Awareness Itself

The Teachings of

Ajaan Fuang Jotiko

Compiled & Translated by

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Introduction

Ajaan Fuang Jotiko, my teacher, was born in 1915 to a small farming family in the province of Chanthaburi, near the Cambodian border of southeastern Thailand. Orphaned at the age of eleven, he was raised in a series of monasteries and received ordination as a monk when he turned twenty. As he began to study the monastic discipline, though, he realized that the monks of his monastery were not really serious about practicing the Buddha's teachings, and he longed to find a teacher who would give him a training more in line with what he had read. His chance came during his second year as a monk, when Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo, a member of the forest ascetic tradition founded by Ajaan Mun Bhuridatto, came to set up a meditation monastery in an old cemetery just outside of Chanthaburi. Taken with Ajaan Lee's teachings, Ajaan Fuang reordained in the sect to which Ajaan Lee belonged and joined him at his new monastery.

From that point onward, with few exceptions, he spent every Rains Retreat under Ajaan Lee's guidance until the latter's death in 1961. One of the exceptions was a five-year period he spent during World War II, meditating alone in the forests of northern Thailand. Another was a six-year period in the early fifties when Ajaan Lee left Ajaan Fuang in charge of the Chanthaburi monastery and wandered about various parts of Thailand in preparation for finding a place to settle down near Bangkok. When in 1956 Ajaan Lee founded Wat Asokaram, his new monastery near Bangkok, Ajaan Fuang joined him there, to help in what was to be the last major project of Ajaan Lee's life.

After Ajaan Lee's death, Ajaan Fuang was generally expected to become abbot at Wat Asokaram. The monastery by that time, though, had grown into such a large, unwieldy community that he did not want the position. So in 1965, when the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, in residence at Wat Makut Kasatriyaram (The Temple of the King's Crown) in Bangkok, asked him to spend the Rains Retreat at his temple, to teach meditation to him and to any of the other monks at the temple who were interested, Ajaan Fuang jumped at the chance.

He spent a total of three Rains Retreats at Wat Makut, wandering about the countryside looking for solitude during the dry seasons. Although he had immense respect for the Supreme Patriarch as an individual, he grew tired of the politicking he saw at the higher ecclesiastical levels and so began looking for a way out. It came in 1968, when a woman named Khun Nai Sombuun Ryangrit donated land to the Patriarch for a small monastery in a mountainous region near the coast of Rayong province, not far from Chanthaburi. Ajaan Fuang volunteered to spend time at the new monastery, Wat Dhammasathit, until a permanent abbot could be found. The monastery, though, was in a very poor area where the local people were not enthusiastic about the idea of a strict meditation monastery in their midst, so no one could be found to take on the position of abbot. Thus, shortly before the Supreme Patriarch's death in a car accident in 1971, Ajaan Fuang accepted the position of abbot at Wat Dhammasathit himself.

It was soon after this that I first met him, in April of 1974. Wat Dhammasathit had the look of a summer camp down on its luck: three monks living in three small huts, a lean-to where they would eat their meals, a kitchen with room for a couple of nuns, and a small wooden structure on top of the hill—where I stayed—which had a view of the sea off to the south. The land had been donated shortly after a fire had stripped it of all its vegetation, and the hillsides were covered mostly with cogon grass. Yearly fires still swept through the area, preventing trees from taking hold, although the area on the mountain above the monastery was covered with a thick, malarial forest.

In spite of the poor conditions, Ajaan Fuang seemed to have a clear-eyed, down-to-earth wisdom that allowed him to transcend his surroundings—an inner peace, happiness, and stability that I envied and admired. After spending a few months practicing meditation under his guidance, I returned to America and then found my way back to Thailand in the fall of 1976 to be ordained as a monk and to begin training under him in earnest.

In my absence, he had begun to develop a small but devoted following of lay meditators. In early 1976 the new abbot of Wat Makut had invited him back to teach there on a regular basis, and for the rest of his life—until his death in 1986—he split his time evenly between Bangkok and Rayong. Most of his students came from the professional classes of Bangkok, people who were turning to meditation for spiritual strength and solace in the face of the fast-changing pressures of modern Thai urban society.

During my first years back in Rayong, the monastery was an incredibly quiet and secluded place, with only a handful of monks and almost no visitors. Fire lanes had begun to hold the fires in check, and a new forest was developing. The quiet atmosphere began to change, though, in the fall of 1979, when construction began on a chedi at the top of the hill. Because the chedi was being built almost entirely with volunteer labor, everyone was involved—monks, lay people from Bangkok, and local villagers.

At first I resented the disruption of the monastery's quiet routine, but I began to notice something interesting: People who never would have thought of meditating were happy to help with the weekend construction brigades; during breaks in the work, when the regulars would go practice meditation with Ajaan Fuang, the newcomers would join in and soon they too would become regular meditators as well. In the meantime, I began learning the important lesson of how to meditate in the midst of less than ideal conditions. Ajaan Fuang himself told me that although he personally disliked construction work, there were people he had to help, and this was the only way he could get to them. Soon after the chedi was finished in 1982, work began on a large Buddha image that was to have an ordination hall in its base, and again, as work progressed on the image, more and more people who came to help with the work were drawn to meditation.

Ajaan Fuang's health deteriorated steadily in his later years. A mild skin condition he had developed during his stay at Wat Makut grew into a full-blown case of psoriasis, and no medicine—Western, Thai, or Chinese—could offer a cure. Still, he maintained an exhausting teaching schedule, although he rarely gave sermons to large groups of people. Instead, he preferred to teach on an

individual basis. His favorite way of getting people started in meditation was to meditate together with them, guiding them through the initial rough spots, and then have them meditate more and more on their own, making way for new beginners. Even during his worst attacks of psoriasis, he would have time to instruct people on a personal basis. As a result, his following—though relatively small compared to that of Ajaan Lee and other famous meditation teachers—was intensely loyal.

In May 1986, a few days after the Buddha image was completed, but before the ordination hall in its base was finished, Ajaan Fuang flew to Hong Kong to visit a student who had set up a meditation center there. Suddenly, on the morning of May 14, while he was sitting in meditation, he suffered a heart attack. The student called an ambulance as soon as he realized what had happened, but Ajaan Fuang was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.

Because he had requested a few years earlier that his body not be cremated, plans began immediately to build him a mausoleum. I was given the task of assembling his biography and any tape-recorded talks that might be transcribed and published as a commemorative volume. I found, to my amazement, that I knew more about his life than anyone else. The people with whom he had lived when he was younger had either died or grown so old that their memories were failing them. All of a sudden the anecdotes he had told me during my first years back with him—of his youth and his years with Ajaan Lee—became the substance of his biography. How much I probably missed, given the fact that my abilities in Thai and familiarity with Thai culture were still developing, was disconcerting to think about.

Even more disconcerting was to discover how little of his teachings were left for posterity. Ordinarily, he refused to let people tape-record his instructions, as he maintained that his teachings were intended for the people listening to put into practice right then and there, and might be wrong for other people at other stages in their practice. The few tapes that *were* made came from simple, introductory talks that he gave to first-time visitors who had come to give a group donation to the monastery, or to people who were just getting started in meditation. Nothing of a more advanced nature was on tape.

So after we printed the commemorative volume, I started a project of my own, writing down what I could remember of his teachings and interviewing his other students for similar material. The interviewing took more than two years and involved a fair amount of editing to extract teachings that would be helpful for people in general and would work in a written format. The result was a small book entitled, *The Language of the Heart.* Then, shortly before I returned to the States to help start a monastery in California, another Ajaan Fuang tape was found, a sermon in which he was giving more advanced instructions to one of his students. I transcribed it and arranged to have it printed as a small booklet named, *Transcendent Discernment.*

The book you are holding in your hand is drawn from these three books. Most of the material comes from *The Language of the Heart,* although parts of that book had to be cut either because they referred to incidents peculiar to Thai culture, or because the puns and wordplay made them untranslatable. Ajaan Fuang loved

playing with language—his sense of humor was one of the first things that attracted me to him—and many of his memorable sayings were memorable for just that reason. Unfortunately, most of these passages lose their impact on translation, and the explanations they would require might quickly become tedious, so I have omitted nearly all of them, leaving in a few—such as the "litter" story—to give a taste of his way with words.

In addition to the passages from *The Language of the Heart,* I have included almost all of *Transcendent Discernment* along with highlights from the commemorative volume. Not everything is a straight translation from these books, for in some cases I have had to retell the anecdotes to make them more accessible to a Western reader. I have been careful throughout, though, to translate the message of Ajaan Fuang's own words as exactly as possible.

In putting this book together, I have had the opportunity to reflect on the student/teacher relationship as it exists in Thailand, and in Ajaan Fuang's dealings with his disciples, both lay and ordained. He provided an atmosphere of warmth and respect in which his students could discuss with him the particular problems of their lives and minds without being made to feel like patients or clients, but simply as fellow human beings to whom he was offering a solid reference point for their lives. Since coming to the West, I find that this sort of relationship is sadly lacking among us and I hope that as Buddhism becomes established here, this sort of relationship will become established as well, for the sake of the mental and spiritual health of our society as a whole.

A group of Thai people once asked me what was the most amazing thing I had ever encountered in Ajaan Fuang, hoping that I would mention his mind-reading abilities or other supernatural powers. Although there were those—his knowledge of my mind seemed uncanny—I told them that what I found most amazing was his kindness and humanity: In all our years together, he had never made me feel that I was a Westerner or that he was a Thai. Our communication was always on a direct, person-to-person level that bypassed cultural differences. I know that many of his other students, although they would not have phrased the issue quite this way, sensed the same quality in him.

I offer this book as a way of sharing some of what I learned from Ajaan Fuang, and dedicate it, with deepest respect, to his memory. He once told me that if it hadn't been for Ajaan Lee, he would never have known the brightness of life. I owe the same debt to him.

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NOTE: For this new, revised edition, I have reinstated the section entitled "Merit", most of which was omitted from the first edition in 1993.

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Mind what you Say

§ Normally, Ajaan Fuang was a man of few words who spoke in response to circumstances: If the circumstances warranted it, he could give long, detailed explanations. If not, he'd say only a word or two—or sometimes nothing at all. He held by Ajaan Lee's dictum: "If you're going to teach the Dhamma to people, but they're not intent on listening, or not ready for what you have to say, then no matter how fantastic the Dhamma you're trying to teach, it still counts as idle chatter, because it doesn't serve any purpose."

§ I was constantly amazed at his willingness—sometimes eagerness—to teach meditation even when he was ill. He explained to me once, "If people are really intent on listening, I find that I'm intent on teaching, and no matter how much I have to say, it doesn't tire me out. In fact, I usually end up with more energy than when I started. But if they're not intent on listening, then I get worn out after the second or third word."

§ "Before you say anything, ask yourself whether it's necessary or not. If it's not, don't say it. This is the first step in training the mind—for if you can't have any control over your mouth, how can you expect to have any control over your mind?"

§ Sometimes his way of being kind was to be cross—although he had his own way of doing it. He never raised his voice or used harsh language, but still his words could burn right into the heart. Once I commented on this fact, and asked him, "Why is it that when your words hurt, they go right to the heart?"

He answered, "That's so you'll remember. If words don't hit home with the person listening, they don't hit home with the person speaking, either."

§ In being cross with his students, he'd take his cue from how earnest the student was. The more earnest, the more critical he'd be, with the thought that this sort of student would use his words to best effect.

Once a lay student of his—who didn't understand this point—was helping to look after him when he was ill in Bangkok. Even though she tried her best to attend to his needs, he was constantly criticizing her, to the point where she was thinking of leaving him. It so happened, though, that another lay student came to visit, and Ajaan Fuang said in a passing remark to him, "When a teacher criticizes his students, it's for one of two reasons: either to make them stay or to make them go."

The first student, on overhearing this, suddenly understood, and so decided to stay.

§ A story that Ajaan Fuang liked to tell—with his own twist—was the Jataka tale of the turtle and the swans.

Once there were two swans who liked to stop by a certain pond every day for a drink of water. As time passed, they struck up a friendship with a turtle who lived in the pond, and they started telling him about some of the many things they saw while flying around up in the air. The turtle was fascinated with their stories, but after a while began to feel very depressed, because he knew he'd never have a chance to see the great wide world the way the swans did. When he mentioned this to them, they said, "Why, that's no problem at all. We'll find a way to take you up with us." So they got a stick. The male swan took one end of the stick in his mouth, the female took the other end in hers, and they had the turtle hold on with its mouth to the middle. When everything was ready, they took off.

As they flew up into the sky, the turtle got to see many, many things he had never dreamed about on the earth below, and was having the time of his life. When they flew over a village, though, some children playing below saw them, and started shouting, "Look! Swans carrying a turtle! Swans carrying a turtle!" This spoiled everything for the turtle, until he thought of a smart retort: "No. The turtle's carrying the swans!" But as soon as he opened his mouth to say it, he fell straight to his death below.

The moral of the story: "Watch out for your mouth when you enter high places."

§ "Litter" is Thai slang for idle chatter, and once Ajaan Fuang used the term to dramatic effect.

It happened one evening when he was teaching in Bangkok. Three young women who were long-time friends happened to show up together at the building where he was teaching, but instead of joining the group that was already meditating, they found themselves an out-of-the-way corner to catch up on the latest gossip. As they were busy talking, they didn't notice that Ajaan Fuang had gotten up to stretch his legs and was walking right past them, with an unlit cigarette in his mouth and a box of matches in his hand. He stopped for a second, lit a match, and instead of lighting his cigarette, tossed the lit match into the middle of their group. Immediately they jumped up, and one of them said, "Than Phaw! Why did you do that? You just barely missed me!"

"I saw a pile of litter there," he answered, "and felt I should set fire to it."

§ One day Ajaan Fuang overheard two students talking, one of them asking a question and the other starting his answer with, "Well, it seems to me..." Immediately Ajaan Fuang cut him off: "If you don't really know, say you don't know, and leave it at that. Why go spreading your ignorance around?"

§ "We each have two ears and one mouth—which shows that we should give more time to listening, and less to speaking."

§ "Whatever happens in the course of your meditation, don't tell it to anyone except your teacher. If you go telling other people, it's bragging. And isn't that a defilement?"

§ "When people advertise how good they are, they're really advertising how stupid they are."

§ "If something's really good, you don't have to advertise."

§ Thailand has a number of monk magazines, somewhat like movie-star magazines, which print the life stories and teachings of famous and not-so-famous monks, nuns, and lay meditation teachers. The life stories tend to be so heavily embellished with supernatural and miraculous events, though, that they are hard to take seriously. From the occasional contact he had with the editors and reporters responsible for these magazines, Ajaan Fuang felt that, by and large, their primary aims were mercenary. As he put it, "The great meditation teachers went into the wilds and put their lives on the line in order to find the Dhamma. When they found it, they offered it free of charge on their return. But these people sit in their air-conditioned offices, write down whatever comes into their heads, and then put it up for sale." As a result, he never cooperated with them when they tried to put him in their magazines.

Once a group of reporters from a magazine named *People Beyond the World* came to visit him, armed with cameras and tape recorders. After paying their respects, they asked for his *prawat,* or personal history. Now it so happens that the Thai word *prawat* can also mean police record, so Ajaan Fuang responded that he didn't have one, as he had never done anything wrong. But the reporters were not easily discouraged. If he didn't want to give his life story, they said, could he please at least teach them some Dhamma. This is a request no monk can refuse, so Ajaan Fuang told them to close their eyes and meditate on the word *buddho*—awake. They turned on their tape recorders and then sat in meditation, waiting for a Dhamma talk, and this was what they heard:

"That's today's Dhamma: two words—*bud*- and *dho*. Now if you can't keep these two words in mind, it would be a waste of time to teach you anything else."

End of sermon. When they realized that that was all, the reporters—looking very exasperated—gathered their cameras and tape recorders and left, never to bother him again.

Mind what you Eat

§ ”We human beings have long tongues, you know. You sit around and suddenly your tongue flicks out to sea: You want to eat seafood. Then it flicks around the world: You want to eat foreign cuisine. You have to train your tongue and shrink it down to size.”

§ “When you eat, keep your mind on your breath, and contemplate why you’re eating. If you’re eating simply for the taste of the food, then what you eat can harm you.”

§ After his trip to America, one of his students asked him if he had had a chance to eat pizza while he was there. He mentioned that he had, and that it was very good. This surprised one of his students who had gone along on the trip. “You ate only two bites,” he said. “We thought you didn’t like it.”

“Two bites were enough to fill me up,” he answered. “Why would you want me to eat more?”

§ Once a woman who had been studying with him for only a short while decided to prepare some food to donate to him. Wanting to make sure it would be something he liked, she asked him straight out, “What kind of food do you like, Than Phaw?”

His answer: “Food that’s within reach.”

§ It was a Friday evening, and a group of Ajaan Fuang’s students were riding in the back of a pickup truck on their way from Bangkok to Wat Dhammasathit. Another student had sent a bushel of oranges along with them to donate to the monks at the wat, and after a while on the road one of the students decided that the oranges looked awfully good. So he came up with the following argument: “We’re Than Phaw’s children, right? And he wouldn’t want us to go hungry, right? So anyone who doesn’t have an orange isn’t a child of Than Phaw.”

Some of the group were observing the eight precepts, which forbid eating food after noon, so they were able to slip through the net. Everyone else, though, helped him or herself to the oranges, even though a few of them felt bad about eating food intended for the monks.

When they arrived at the wat, they told Ajaan Fuang what had happened, and he immediately lit into them, saying that anyone who takes food intended for monks and eats it before it has been given to the monks is going to be reborn as a hungry ghost in the next life.

This scared one woman in the group, who immediately responded, “But I only ate one section!”

Ajaan Fuang replied, "Well, if you're going to be a hungry ghost, you might as well eat enough to fill yourself up while you can."

§ During the Rains Retreat in 1977 a couple from the town of Rayong came out to the wat almost every evening to practice meditation. The strange thing about them was that whatever happened in the course of their meditation would tend to happen to both of them at the same time.

On one occasion they both found that they couldn't eat, because they were overcome by a sense of the filthiness of food. This lasted for three or four days without their getting weak or hungry, so they began to wonder what stage they had reached in their meditation.

When they mentioned this to Ajaan Fuang on their next visit to the wat, he had them sit in meditation, and then told them. "Okay, contemplate food to see what it's made of. Elements, right? And what's your body made of? The very same elements. The elements in your body need the elements in food in order to keep going. So why get all worked up about the filthiness of food? Your body is even filthier. When the Buddha teaches us to contemplate the filthiness of food, it's so that we can get over our delusions about it—not so that we won't be able to eat."

That ended their inability to eat food.

People practicing the Dhamma

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students—a seamstress—was criticized by a customer: "You practice the Dhamma, don't you? Then why are you so greedy, charging such high prices? People practicing the Dhamma should take only enough profit just to get by."

Although she knew her prices were fair, she couldn't think of a good answer, so the next time she saw Ajaan Fuang she told him what had happened. He replied, "The next time they say that, tell them—'Look, I'm not practicing the Dhamma to be stupid.'"

§ When I first went to stay at Wat Dhammasathit, the B-52's from Utapao Air Force Base could sometimes be heard high overhead in the wee hours of the morning, flying on their bombing missions into Cambodia. Each time I heard them, I began to wonder what business I had meditating when there were so many injustices in the world that needed to be fought. When I mentioned this to Ajaan Fuang, he said, "If you try to straighten out the world without really straightening yourself out first, your own inner goodness will eventually break down, and then where will you be? You won't be able to do anybody—yourself or anyone else—any good at all."

§ "As soon as we're born, we're sentenced to death—just that we don't know when our turn will come. So you can't be complacent. Start right in and develop all your good qualities to the full while you still have the chance."

§ "If you want to be a good person, make sure you know where true goodness really lies. Don't just go through the motions of being good."

§ "We all want happiness, but for the most part we aren't interested in building the causes for happiness. All we want are the results. But if we don't take an interest in the causes, how are the results going to come our way?"

§ When I first went to practice meditation with Ajaan Fuang, I asked him if people really were reborn after death. He answered, "When you start out practicing, the Buddha asks you to believe in only one thing: karma. As for things aside from that, whether or not you believe them isn't really important."

§ One year, shortly before the Rains Retreat—a time when people traditionally make resolutions to step up their practice of the Dhamma—one of Ajaan Fuang's students approached him and said that she was thinking of observing the eight precepts during the Rains, but was afraid that going without the evening meal would leave her hungry.

He retorted: “The Buddha fasted until he didn’t have any flesh at all—just skin and bones—so that he could discover the Dhamma to teach us, but here we can’t even stand going without one single meal. It’s because of this that we’re still swimming around in the cycle of birth and death.”

As a result, she resolved that she’d have to observe the eight precepts on each Buddhist sabbath—the full moon, the new moon, and the half-moon days—during the three months of the Rains. And so she did. At the end of the Rains she felt really proud of herself for having kept to her resolution, but on her next visit to Ajaan Fuang, before she was able to broach the topic at all, he commented, “You’re lucky, you know. Your Rains Retreat has only twelve days. Everyone else’s is three months.”

On hearing this she felt so embarrassed that she has observed the eight precepts every day throughout each Rains Retreat ever since.

§ Another student was meditating in Ajaan Fuang’s presence when—in a spasm of mindlessness—she slapped a mosquito that was biting her arm. Ajaan Fuang commented: “You charge a high price for your blood, don’t you? The mosquito asks for a drop, and you take its life in exchange.”

§ A young man was discussing the precepts with Ajaan Fuang and came to number five, against taking intoxicants: “The Buddha forbade alcohol because most people lose their mindfulness when they drink it, right? But if you drink mindfully it’s okay, isn’t it, Than Phaw?”

“If you were really mindful,” he answered, ”you wouldn’t drink it in the first place.”

§ There seem to be more excuses for breaking the fifth precept than for any other. One evening another student was conversing with Ajaan Fuang at the same time that a group of people were sitting around them in meditation. “I can’t observe the fifth precept,” he said, ”because I’m under a lot of group pressure. When we have social occasions at work, and everyone else in the group is drinking, I have to drink along with them.”

Ajaan Fuang pointed to the people sitting around them and asked, “This group isn’t asking you to drink. Why don’t you give in to their group pressure instead?”

§ The seamstress saw her friends observing the eight precepts at Wat Dhammasathit, and so decided to try it herself. But in the middle of the afternoon, as she was walking through the monastery, she passed a guava tree. The guavas looked inviting, so she picked one and took a bite.

Ajaan Fuang happened to be standing not far away, and so he remarked, “Hey. I thought you were going to observe the eight precepts. What’s that in your mouth?”

The seamstress realized in a jolt that she had broken her precepts, but Ajaan Fuang consoled her, “It’s not all that necessary to observe the eight precepts, but

make sure you observe the one precept, okay? Do you know what the one precept is?"

"No, Than Phaw. What is it?"

"Not doing any evil. I want you to hold onto this one for life."

§ A woman came to Wat Dhammasathit to observe the precepts and meditate for a week, but by the end of the second day she told Ajaan Fuang that she had to return home, because she was afraid her family couldn't get along without her. He taught her to cut through her worries by saying, "When you come here, tell yourself that you've died. One way or another, your family will have to learn to fend for themselves."

§ On his first visit to Wat Dhammasathit, a middle-aged man was surprised to see an American monk. He asked Ajaan Fuang, "How is it that Westerners can ordain?"

Ajaan Fuang's answer: "Don't Westerners have hearts?"

§ A Bangkok magazine once carried the serialized autobiography of a lay meditator who used his powers of concentration to treat diseases. One installment mentioned how he had visited Ajaan Fuang, who had certified that he (the layman) had attained *jhana.* This didn't sound like Ajaan Fuang's style, but soon after the magazine came out, unusual numbers of people came to the wat under the impression that Ajaan Fuang, like the author of the autobiography, could treat illnesses through meditation. One woman asked him if he treated kidney diseases, and he answered, "I treat only one kind of disease: diseases of the mind."

§ A student asked permission to keep a notebook of Ajaan Fuang's teachings, but he refused, saying, "Is that the sort of person you are?—always carrying food around in your pocket for fear there'll be nothing to eat?" Then he explained: "If you jot everything down, you'll feel it's okay to forget what you've written because it's all there in your notebook. The end result is that all the Dhamma will be in your notebook, and none in your heart."

§ "The texts say that if you listen well, you'll gain wisdom. To listen well, your heart has to be quiet and still. You listen with your heart, not just with your ears. Once you've listened, you have to put what you've heard into practice right then and there. That's when you'll reap the benefits. If you don't put it into practice, what you've heard will never become real inside you."

§ Once, while the chedi at Wat Dhammasathit was being built, some of the students working on the chedi got into a serious argument. One of them became so upset that she went to tell Ajaan Fuang, who was staying in Bangkok at the time. When she finished her report, he asked her, "Do you know what gravel is?"

Taken aback, she answered, "Yes."

"Do you know what diamonds are?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you gather the diamonds? What good do you get out of gathering gravel?"

§ Even in a Buddhist country like Thailand, some young people who practice the Dhamma find that their parents are against it, and feel that they should be spending their time in more practical ways. Once the parents of the seamstress tried to put a stop to her visits to Wat Makut, and this got her very angry. But when she told her feelings to Ajaan Fuang, he warned her, "You owe a huge debt to your parents, you know. If you get angry with them, or yell at them, you're stoking the fires of hell on your head, so watch out. And remind yourself: If you wanted parents who would encourage your practice, why didn't you choose to be born from somebody else? The fact that they're your parents shows that you've made past karma with them. So just use up your old karma debts as they come. There's no need to create any more karma by getting into arguments."

§ Channeling spirits has long been popular in Thailand, and even some people who practice the Dhamma also like to attend seances. But Ajaan Fuang once said, "If you want results from your practice, you have to make up your mind that the Buddha is your one and only refuge. Don't go taking refuge in anything else."

§ "If you practice the Dhamma, you don't have to be amazed by anyone else's powers or abilities. Whatever you do, say or think, let your heart take its stand on the principles of reason."

§ "The truth lies within you. If you're true in what you do, you'll meet with the truth. If you're not, you'll meet only with things that are fake and imitation."

Merit

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students reports that the first time she met him, he asked her, "Where do you usually go to make merit?" She answered that she had helped sponsor a Buddha image at that temple and contributed to a crematorium at this temple, etc. So he asked further: "Why haven't you made merit at your heart?"

§ Once Ajaan Fuang had one of his students cut away some of the grass and weeds that were threatening to overgrow the monastery. She didn't really want to do the work, though, and all the while as she was cutting away she kept asking herself, "What kind of karma did I do that I have to work so hard like this?" When she had finished, he told her, "Well, you got some merit, but not very much."

"What? After all that work, I still didn't get very much?"

"If you want your full measure of merit, the merit has to go all the way to your heart."

§ There's another story involving grass. One day Ajaan Fuang pointed out the overgrown grass near his hut and asked the same woman, "Don't you want the grass at the corral gate?"

"What do you mean, grass at the corral gate?"

"The opportunity to make merit right nearby that everyone else overlooks. That's called 'grass at the corral gate.'"

§ Another time, Ajaan Fuang took some of his Bangkok students up the hill to clean the area around the chedi. They found a large pile of trash that someone had thrown away up there, and one of the group complained, "How could anyone be so disrespectful as to do something like this?" But Ajaan Fuang told her, "Don't criticize whoever did it. If they hadn't thrown the trash here, we wouldn't have the opportunity to earn the merit that comes from cleaning it up."

§ One day, after Ajaan Fuang's name had appeared in a magazine article, a group of three men from Bangkok took a day off from work to drive to Rayong and pay their respects to him. After bowing down and then chatting for a while, one of them said, "Our country still has monks who practice rightly and well so that we can ask to have a share of their paramis, isn't that true, Than Phaw?"

"It's true," he answered, "but if we keep asking for a share of their paramis without developing any of our own, they'll see that we're simply beggars and they won't want to share with us any more."

§ A woman in the town of Samut Prakaan, just outside of Bangkok, sent word through one of Ajaan Fuang's students that she'd like to donate a large sum of money to help build the Buddha image at Wat Dhammasathit, but she wanted him to come to her home to give a blessing as she handed over the check. He refused to go, saying, "If people want merit, they have to go looking for it. They can't expect the merit to come looking for them."

§ Another woman once telephoned the main office at Wat Makut, saying that she was going to provide a meal for monks at her house and wanted to invite Ajaan Fuang to the meal because she had heard that he was a Noble Disciple. When the invitation was conveyed to him, he refused it, saying, "Is her rice so special that only Noble Disciples can get to eat it?"

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students told him that she'd like to do something special to make merit on her birthday. He replied, "Why does it have to be on your birthday? Do you get less merit if you do it any other day? If you want to make merit, go ahead and do it on the day the thought occurs to you. Don't wait for your birthday, because your deathday may get to you first."

§ Referring to people who didn't like to meditate but were happy to help with the construction work at the wat, Ajaan Fuang once said, "Light merit doesn't register with them, so you have to find some really heavy merit for them to make. That's the only way to keep them satisfied."

§ Shortly after the chedi was finished, a group of Ajaan Fuang's students were sitting and admiring it, taking joy in all the merit in store for them because they had had a hand in building it. Ajaan Fuang happened to walk by and overhear what they were saying, and so he commented, as if to no one in particular, "Don't get attached to material things. When you make merit, don't get attached to the merit. If you let yourself get carried away, thinking 'I built this chedi with my own hands,' watch out. If you happened to die right now, all you'd be able to think would be, 'This chedi is mine, it's mine.' Instead of being reborn in heaven with everyone else, you'd be reborn as a hungry ghost to guard over the chedi for a week or so because your heart was fixated on material things."

§ "If, when you do good, you get stuck on your goodness, you'll never get free. Wherever you're stuck, that's where there's becoming and birth."

§ There is an old tradition in Buddhism—based on the Apadana tales—that whenever you make a gift to the religion or perform some other meritorious deed, you should dedicate the merit of the deed to a particular goal. There were times when Ajaan Fuang would tell his students to make similar dedications every time they meditated, although the dedication he'd recommend would depend on the individual. Sometimes he'd recommend the dedication King Asoka made at the end of his life: "In my future lives may I have sovereignty over the mind."

Other times he'd say, "There's no need to make any long, drawn-out dedications. Tell yourself: If I have to be reborn, may I always encounter the Buddha's teachings."

But it wasn't always the case that he would recommend such dedications. Once a woman told him that when she made merit she couldn't think of any particular goal to dedicate the merit towards. He told her, "If the mind is full, there's no need to make any dedication if you don't want to. It's like eating. Whether or not you express a wish to get full, if you keep on eating, there's no way you can help but get full."

Student/Teacher

§ "Whatever you do, always think of your teacher. If you forget your teacher, you're cutting yourself off at the root."

§ "A person who goes from teacher to teacher doesn't really have any teachers at all."

§ On occasion people would present Ajaan Fuang with amulets, and he would hand them out among his students—but only rarely among those who were especially close to him. One day a monk who had lived several years with him couldn't help but complain, "Why is it that when you get good amulets, you never give any to me, and always to everybody else?"

Ajaan Fuang replied, "I've already given you lots of things better than that. Why don't you accept them?"

§ "Meditators who live close to their teacher, but who don't understand him, are like a spoon in a pot of curry: It'll never know how sweet, sour, salty, rich or hot the curry is."

§ Ajaan Fuang's analogy for students who always have to ask their teachers for advice on how to handle even minor problems in everyday life: "They're just like baby puppies. As soon as they defecate they have to run to their mother to have her lick them off. They'll never grow up on their own."

§ "Students who get stuck on their teachers are like gnats. No matter how much you chase them away, they keep coming back and won't leave you alone."

§ "If a teacher praises a student to his face, it's a sign that that's as far as the student will go—he probably won't be able to practice to any greater heights in this lifetime. The reason the teacher praises him is so that he'll be able to take pride in the fact that at least he's made it this far. His heart will have something good to hold on to when he needs it at death."

§ Many of Ajaan Fuang's students were convinced that he was able to read their minds, because time after time he would broach topics that happened to be going through their heads or weighing down their hearts at the moment. I myself had many experiences like this, and many were reported to me while I was compiling this book. In most cases of this sort, though, what he had to say had special meaning only for those directly involved, and so I'll ask to pass over them here. But there are two cases I'd like to mention, because they strike me as being useful for all who practice the Dhamma.

Once, one of his students—a young man—took the bus from Bangkok to Rayong to help work on the chedi. He got off at the mouth of the road leading to the wat, but didn't feel like walking the six kilometers it would take to get there, so he sat at the noodle stand by the intersection and said to himself—as a challenge to Ajaan Fuang—"If Than Phaw is really something special, may a car come by and give me a lift to the wat." One hour passed, two, three, and not a single car or truck turned into the road, so he finally had to walk the distance on foot.

When he arrived at the wat, he went to Ajaan Fuang's hut to pay his respects, but as soon as Ajaan Fuang saw him approach, he got up, entered his room and closed the door. This shook the student a little, but still he bowed down in front of the closed door. The moment he finished, Ajaan Fuang opened the door a crack and said, "Look. I didn't ask for you to come here. You came of your own free will."

Another time, after the chedi was finished, the same young man was sitting in meditation at the chedi, in hopes that a voice would whisper the winning number of the next lottery in his ear. What he heard, though, was the sound of Ajaan Fuang actually walking past and saying, as if to no one in particular, "Exactly what are you taking as your refuge?"

Living in the World

§ "Ajaan Mun once said, 'People are all alike, but not at all alike, but in the final analysis, all alike.' You have to think about this for a good while before you can understand what he was getting at."

§ "If you want to judge other people, judge them by their intentions."

§ "When you want to teach other people to be good, you have to see how far their goodness can go. If you try to make them better than they can be, *you're* the one who's being stupid."

§ "Nothing comes from focusing on the faults of others. You can get more done by looking at your own faults instead."

§ "How good or bad other people are is their own business. Focus on your own business instead."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students complained to him about all the problems she was facing at work. She wanted to quit and live quietly by herself, but circumstances wouldn't allow it, because she had to provide for her mother. Ajaan Fuang told her, "If you have to live with these things, then find out how to live in a way that rises above them. That's the only way you'll be able to survive."

§ Advice for a student who was letting the pressure at work get her down: "When you do a job, don't let the job do you."

§ Another one of Ajaan Fuang's students was having serious problems, both at home and in her work, so he appealed to her fighting spirit: "Anyone who's a real, live person will have to meet up with real, live problems in life."

§ "When you meet with obstacles, you have to put up a fight. If you give up easily, you'll end up giving up all your life long."

§ "Tell yourself you're made out of heartwood, and not out of sapwood."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students—a young nurse—had to put up with being the brunt of a lot of gossip at work. At first she tried to ignore it, but as it happened more and more often, her patience began to wear thin.

One day, when the gossip was really getting to her, she went to meditate with Ajaan Fuang at Wat Makut. While meditating, she saw a vision of herself repeating back, back, back to infinity, as if she were caught between two parallel mirrors. The thought occurred to her that in her many previous lives she had probably had to endure an untold amount of the same sort of gossip, and this

made her even more fed up with her situation. So when she left meditation she told Ajaan Fuang of how tired she was of being gossiped about. He tried to console her, saying, "This sort of thing is part and parcel of the world, you know. Where there's praise, there also has to be criticism and gossip. When you know this, why let yourself get involved?"

Her mood was so strong, though, that she argued with him, "I'm not getting involved with them, Than Phaw. They come and get involved with me!"

So he turned the tables on her: "Then why don't you ask yourself—who asked you to butt in and be born here in the first place?"

§ "If they say you're no good, remind yourself that their words go only as far as their lips. They've never reached out and touched you at all."

§ "Other people criticize us and then forget all about it, but we take it and keep thinking about it. It's as if they spit out some food and we pick it up and eat it. When that's the case, who's being stupid?"

§ "Pretend you have stones weighing down your ears, so that you don't get blown away by everything you hear said."

§ One day Ajaan Fuang asked, as if out of the blue, "If your clothing fell down into a cesspool, would you pick it back up again?"

The woman he asked had no idea what he was getting at, but knew that if she wasn't careful about answering his questions, she'd come out looking like a fool, so she hedged her answer: "It depends. If it was my only set of clothing, I'd have to pick it up. But if I had other sets, I'd probably let it go. What are you getting at, Than Phaw?"

"If you like to hear bad things about other people, then even though you have no part in the bad karma of their acts, you still pick up some of the stench."

§ If any of his students were bearing a grudge about something, he would tell them: "You can't even sacrifice something as minor as this? Think of it as making a gift. Remember how many valuable things the Buddha sacrificed during his life as Prince Vessantara, and then ask yourself, 'This anger of mine has no value at all. Why can't I sacrifice it, too?'"

§ "Think first before you act. Don't be the sort of person who acts first and then has to think about it afterwards."

§ "Beware of fall-in-the-well kindness: the cases where you want to help other people, but instead of your pulling them up, they pull you down.

§ "When people say something is good, it's their idea of good. But is it always what's really good for you?"

§ "If people hate you, that's when you're let off the hook. You can come and go as you like without having to worry about whether or not they'll miss you or

get upset at your going. And you don't have to bring any presents for them when you come back. You're free to do as you like."

§ "Trying to win out over other people brings nothing but animosity and bad karma. It's better to win out over yourself."

§ "Whatever you lose, let it be lost, but don't ever lose heart."

§ "If they take what's yours, tell yourself that you're making it a gift. Otherwise there will be no end to the animosity."

§ "Their taking what's yours is better than your taking what's theirs."

§ "If it's really yours, it'll have to stay with you, no matter what. If it's not really yours, why get all worked up about it?"

§ "There's nothing wrong with being poor on the outside, but make sure you're not poor on the inside. Make yourself rich in generosity, virtue, and meditation—the treasures of the mind."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students complained to him, "I look at other people and they seem to have such an easy life. Why is life so hard on me?" His answer: "Your 'hard life' is ten, twenty times 'the good life' for a lot of people. Why don't you look at the people who have a harder time than you do?"

§ Sometimes when any of his students were facing hardships in life, Ajaan Fuang would teach them to remind themselves: "How can I blame anyone else? Nobody ever hired me to be born. I came of my own free will."

§ "Everything that happens has its lifespan. It won't last forever. When its lifespan is up, it'll go away on its own."

§ "To have a partner in life is to suffer. To have a good partner is really to suffer, because of all the attachment."

§ "Sensual pleasure is like a drug: One taste and you get addicted. They say that with heroin it's hard to break the habit, but this is even worse. It goes deep, right into the bone. It's what made us get born in the first place, and has kept us circling through birth and death for aeons and aeons. There's no medicine you can take to break the habit, to wash it out of your system, aside from the medicine of the Buddha's teachings."

§ "When we see Hindus worshiping Siva lingas it looks strange to us, but actually everyone in the world worships the Siva linga—i.e. they worship sex, simply that the Hindus are the only ones who are open about it. Sex is the creator of the world. The reason we're all born is because we worship the Siva linga in our hearts."

§ Once, when one of Ajaan Fuang's students was being pressured by her parents to look for a husband so that she could settle down and have children, she asked him, "Is it true what they say, that a woman gains a lot of merit in having a child, in that she gives someone else the chance to be born?"

"If that were true," he answered her, "then dogs would get gobs of merit, because they give birth to whole litters at a time."

§ He also told her, "Getting married is no way to escape suffering. Actually, all you do is pile more suffering on yourself. The Buddha taught that the five *khandhas* are a heavy burden, but if you get married, all of a sudden you have ten to worry about, and then fifteen, and then twenty..."

§ "You have to be your own refuge. If you're the sort that has to take refuge in other people, then you'll have to see things the same way they do, which means you have to be stupid the same way they are. So pull yourself out of all that, and take a good look at yourself until things are clear within you."

§ "You may think, 'my child, my child,' but is it really yours? Even your own body isn't really yours."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students, when she was suffering a serious liver disease, dreamed that she had died and gone to heaven. She took this as a bad omen and so went to Wat Makut to tell her dream to Ajaan Fuang. He tried to console her, saying that it was really a good omen in disguise. If she survived the disease, she'd probably get a promotion at work. If she didn't, she'd be reborn in good circumstances. As soon as he said this, though, she got very upset: "But I'm not ready to die!"

"Look," he told her, "when the time comes to go, you have to be willing to go. Life isn't a rubber band you can stretch out or shrink as you like."

§ "If there are any sensual pleasures you really hunger for, it's a sign you enjoyed them before in a previous life. That's why you miss them so much this time around. If you think about this long enough, it should be enough to make you dispassionate and dismayed."

The Celibate Life

§ "Some people say that monks don't do any work, but actually the work of abandoning your defilements is the most difficult work in the world. The work of the everyday world has its days off, but our work doesn't have any time off at all. It's something you have to do 24 hours a day. Sometimes you may feel you're not up to it, but still you have to do it. If you don't, who's going to do it for you? It's your duty, and nobody else's. If you don't do it, what are you living off the donations of other people for?"

§ "Whatever work you're doing, keep an eye on your mind. If you see that it's going off the path, stop whatever you're doing and focus all your attention on it. The work of looking after your mind should always come first."

§ "The Buddha's Dhamma is *akaliko*—timeless. The reason we haven't reached it yet is because we have lots of times: time for this, time for that, time to work, time to rest, time to eat, time to sleep…Our whole life turns into times, and as a result they don't give us a chance to see the truth clearly within ourselves. So we have to make our practice timeless. That's when the truth will appear in our hearts."

§ Ajaan Fuang was very meticulous about keeping things clean and in their place, and taught his students to be meticulous too, for that was the way he was taught by his teachers, and he knew that he had benefited from it. In his words, "If you can't master obvious things like this, how are you going to master the subtle things, like the mind?"

§ The monk who attended to his needs—cleaning his hut, boiling the water for his bath, looking after him when he was sick, etc.—had to be very observant, for Ajaan Fuang used the teacher-student relationship as an opportunity to teach by example. Instead of explaining where things should be placed or when certain duties should be done, he left it up to the student to observe for himself. If he caught on, Ajaan Fuang wouldn't say anything. If he didn't, Ajaan Fuang would give him a dressing down—but still wouldn't explain what was wrong. It was up to the student to figure things out for himself. As Ajaan Fuang said, "If it gets to the point where I have to tell you, it shows that we're still strangers."

§ One evening, one of the monks at Wat Dhammasathit saw Ajaan Fuang working alone, picking up scraps of lumber around the chedi construction site and putting them in order. The monk ran down to help him, and after a while asked him, "Than Phaw, this sort of work isn't something you should be doing alone. There are lots of other people. Why don't you get them to help?"

"I *am* getting other people to help," Ajaan Fuang answered as he continued to pick up pieces of wood.

“Who?” the monk asked as he looked around and saw no one else.

“You.”

§ When I returned to Thailand in 1976 to be ordained, Ajaan Fuang gave me two warnings: 1) “Being a meditator isn’t simply a matter of sitting with your eyes closed. You have to be sharp at everything you do.”

2) “If you want to learn, you have to think like a thief and figure out how to steal your knowledge. What this means is that you can’t just wait for the teacher to explain everything. You have to notice for yourself what he does, and why—for everything he does has its reason.”

§ The relationship of a monk to his supporters is something of a balancing act. One of Ajaan Fuang’s favorite reminders to his monk disciples was, “Remember, nobody’s hired you to become a monk. You haven’t ordained to become anybody’s servant.” But if a monk complained that the monastery attendants weren’t doing as they were told, he’d say, “Did you ordain to have other people wait on you?”

§ “Our life depends on the support of others, so don’t do anything that would weigh them down.”

§ “Monks who eat the food that other people donate, but then don’t practice, can expect to be reborn as water buffaloes next time around, to till the fields and work off their debts.”

§ “Don’t think that the small disciplinary rules aren’t important. As Ajaan Mun once said, logs have never gotten into people’s eyes, but fine sawdust can—and it can blind you.”

§ Western women are often upset when they learn that monks aren’t allowed to touch them, and they usually take it as a sign that Buddhism discriminates against women. But as Ajaan Fuang explained it, “The reason the Buddha didn’t allow monks to touch women is not that there’s anything wrong with women. It’s because there’s something wrong with the monks: They still have mental defilements, which is why they have to be kept under control.”

§ For anyone who tries to follow the celibate life, the opposite sex is the biggest temptation to leave the path. If Ajaan Fuang was teaching monks, he’d say, “Women are like vines. At first they seem so weak and soft, but if you let them grow on you, they curl up around you until they have you all tied up and finally bring you down.”

When teaching nuns, he’d warn them about men. Once a nun was thinking of disrobing and returning home, knowing that her father would arrange a marriage for her. She asked Ajaan Fuang for advice, and he told her, “Ask yourself. Do you want to live inside the noose or out?” As a result, she decided she’d rather stay out.

§ "If you find yourself thinking about sex, run your hand over your head to remind yourself of who you are."

§ Ajaan Fuang had many stories to tell about his times with Ajaan Lee. One of my favorites was of the time a large group of Ajaan Lee's Bangkok students arranged to go with him on a meditation trip into the forest. They agreed to meet at Hua Lampong, the main train station in Bangkok, and take the train north to Lopburi. When the group assembled at the station, though, it turned out that many of them had each brought along at least two large suitcases of "necessities" for the trip, and even many of the monks from Bangkok monasteries had brought along large loads. On seeing this, Ajaan Lee said nothing, but simply set out walking north along the railroad tracks. Since he was walking, everyone had to walk, although it wasn't long before the members of the group most burdened down began complaining, "Than Phaw, why are you making us walk? We've got so much heavy stuff to carry!"

At first Ajaan Lee said nothing, but finally told them, as he kept on walking, "If it's heavy, then why burden yourself with it?" It took a few moments for his message to sink in, but soon the different members of the group had stopped to open their bags and throw everything unessential into the lotus ponds that lined either side of the railroad tracks. When they reached the next train station, Ajaan Lee saw that they had trimmed down their belongings enough that he could let them take the next train north.

§ "When you live in a monastery, pretend that you're living alone: What this means is that once you've finished with the group activities—the meal, the chanting, the chores, and so on—you don't have to get involved with anyone. Go back to your hut and meditate.

"When you live alone, pretend that you're in a monastery: Set up a schedule and stick to it."

§ When I went to Wat Asokaram—a very large monastery—for my first Rains Retreat, Ajaan Fuang told me, "If they ask you questions in Thai, answer in English. If they ask in English, answer in Thai. After a while they'll get tired to talking to you, and will leave you alone to meditate."

§ "It's good to live in a monastery where not everyone is serious about the practice, because it teaches you to depend on yourself. If you lived only with people who were serious meditators, you'd get so that you wouldn't be able to survive anywhere else."

§ "We keep disagreeable people around the monastery as a way of testing to see if our defilements really are all gone."

§ "The purpose of adhering to the ascetic practices is to wear down your defilements. If you adhere to them with the thought of impressing other people, you'd do better not to adhere to them at all."

§ On fasting as an aid to meditation: "For some people it works well, for others it works just the opposite—the more they fast, the stronger their defilements get. It's not the case that when you starve the body you starve the defilements, because defilements don't come from the body. They come from the mind."

§ "There's a passage where the Buddha asks, 'Days and nights pass by, pass by. What are you doing right now?' So what answer do you have for him?"

§ "If you go teaching others before your own practice is up to standard, you do more harm than good."

§ "Training a meditator is like training a boxer: You pull your punches and don't hit him any harder than he can take. But when he comes back at you, he gives it everything he's got."

§ The first time I was going to give a sermon, Ajaan Fuang told me: "Pretend you have a sword in your hand. If any people in the audience think critical thoughts of you, cut off their heads."

§ When I first went to Wat Dhammasathit, the trip from Bangkok was an all-day affair, since the roads were much worse and more roundabout than now. One evening a woman rented a cab and traveled all the way from Bangkok to get Ajaan Fuang's advice on the problems she was having in her family, and after a couple of hours of consultation she took the cab all the way back.

After she left, he said to me, "There's one good thing about living way out here: If we were living near Bangkok, people with a lot of free time on their hands and no idea of how to spend it would come and waste our time chatting all day. But here, when people make the effort to come out, it shows that they really want our help. And no matter how many hours it takes to talk things over with them, it's no waste of time at all."

§ "When people come to see me, I have them sit and meditate first so that they know how to make their minds quiet. Only then will I let them bring up any other problems they may want to talk about. If you try discussing things with them when their minds aren't quiet, there's no way they'll understand."

§ "If people get it into their heads that they're enlightened when they aren't, then you shouldn't waste any breath on trying to straighten them out. If they don't have faith in you 100%, then the more you try to reason with them, the more they'll get set in their opinions. If they do have faith in you, then all it takes is one sentence or two and they'll come to their senses."

§ Once the father of one of the monks living with Ajaan Fuang wrote his son a letter asking him to disrobe, return home, continue his studies, get a job, start a family, and have a normal, happy life like everyone else in the world. The monk mentioned this to Ajaan Fuang, who said, "He says his kind of happiness is something special, but look at it—what kind of happiness is it, really? Just the

same old smelly stuff you left when you ordained. Isn’t there any happiness better than that?”

Meditation

§ Many were the times when people would tell Ajaan Fuang that—with all the work and responsibilities in their lives—they had no time to meditate. And many were the times he'd respond, "And you think you'll have time after you're dead?"

§ "All you have to study is the meditation-word, *buddho*. As for any other fields you might study, they never come to an end, and can't take you beyond suffering. But once you're come to the end of *buddho,* that's when you'll come to true happiness."

§ "When the mind's not quiet—that's when its poor and burdened with difficulties. It takes molehills and turns them into mountains. But when the mind is quiet, there's no suffering, because there's nothing at all. No mountains at all. When there's a lot to the mind, it's simply a lot of defilement, making it suffer."

§ "If you're single-minded about whatever you think of doing, you're sure to succeed."

§ "When you're thinking *buddho* you don't have to wonder about whether or not you'll do well in your meditation. If you put your mind to it, you're sure to do well. The things that come to disturb you are simply the forces of temptation, come to put on a play. Whatever the play, all you have to do is watch—you don't have to get on stage with them."

§ "What's really essential is that you bring your views in line with the truth. Once your views are right, the mind will immediately come to rest. If your views are wrong, everything is immediately wrong. All the things you need for the practice—the breath, the mind—are already there. So try to bring your views in line with the breath, and you won't have to use a lot of force in your meditation. The mind will settle down and come to rest right away."

§ "The mind is like a king. Its moods are like his ministers. Don't be a king who's easily swayed by his court."

§ A group of lay people who had studied the Abhidhamma together came to Ajaan Fuang to try out his version of mental training, but when he told them to sit, close their eyes, and focus on the breath, they immediately backed off, saying that they didn't want to practice concentration, for fear that they'd get stuck on *jhana* and end up being reborn in the Brahma worlds. He responded, "What's there to be afraid of? Even Non-returners are reborn in the Brahma worlds. At any rate, being reborn in the Brahma worlds is better than being reborn as a dog."

§ When Ajaan Fuang taught meditation, he didn't like to map things out in advance. As soon as he had explained the beginning steps, he'd have the student start sitting right in his presence, and then take the steps back home to work on there. If anything came up in the course of the practice, he'd explain how to deal with it and then go on to the next step.

Once a layman who had known more than his share of meditation teachers came to discuss the Dhamma with Ajaan Fuang, asking him many questions of an advanced nature as a way of testing his level of attainment. Ajaan Fuang asked him in return, "Have you had these experiences in your own meditation yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Then in that case I'd rather not discuss them, because if we discuss them when they're not yet a reality for you, they'll just be theories, and not the real Dhamma."

§ One meditator noticed that his practice under Ajaan Fuang was making quick progress, and so he asked what the next step would be. "I'm not going to tell you," Ajaan Fuang said. "Otherwise you'll become the sort of amazing marvel who knows everything before he meets with it, and masters everything before he's tried his hand. Just keep practicing and you'll find out on your own."

§ "You can't plan the way your practice is going to go. The mind has its own steps and stages, and you have to let the practice follow in line with them. That's the only way you'll get genuine results. Otherwise you'll turn into a half-baked arahant."

§ "Don't make a journal of your meditation experiences. If you do, you'll start meditating in order to have this or that thing happen, so that you can write it down in your journal. And as a result, you'll end up with nothing but the things you've fabricated."

§ Some people are afraid to meditate too seriously, for fear that they'll go crazy, but as Ajaan Fuang once said, "You have to be crazy about meditation if you want to meditate well. And as for whatever problems come up, there are always ways to solve them. What's *really* scary is if you don't meditate enough for the problems to come out in the open in the first place."

§ "Other people can teach you only the outer skin, but as for what lies deeper inside, only you can lay down the law for yourself. You have to draw the line, being mindful, keeping track of what you do at all times. It's like having a teacher following you around, in public and in private, keeping watch over you, telling you what to do and what not to do, making sure that you stay in line. If you don't have this sort of teacher inside you, the mind is bound to stray off the path and get into mischief, shoplifting all over town."

§ "Persistence comes from conviction, discernment from being mindful."

§ "Persistence in the practice is a matter of the mind, and not of your posture. In other words, whatever you do, keep your mindfulness constant and don't let it lapse. No matter what your activity, make sure the mind sticks with its meditation work."

§ "When you start out sitting in meditation, it takes a long time for the mind to settle down, but as soon as the session is over you get right up and throw it away. It's like climbing a ladder slowly, step by step, to the second floor, and then jumping out the window."

§ A woman army officer sat in meditation with Ajaan Fuang at Wat Makut until it seemed that her mind was especially blissful and bright. But when she returned home, instead of trying to maintain that state of mind, she sat around listening to a friend's woes until she herself started feeling depressed, too. A few days later she returned to Wat Makut and told Ajaan Fuang what had happened. He responded, "You took gold and traded it in for excrement."

§ Another student disappeared for several months, and on her return told Ajaan Fuang, "The reason I didn't show up is that my boss sent me to night school for a semester, so I didn't have any time to meditate at all. But now that the course is over, I don't want to do anything but meditate—no work, no study, just let the mind be still."

She thought he'd be pleased to hear how intent she still was on meditating, but he disappointed her. "So you don't want to work—that's a defilement, isn't it? Whoever said that people can't work and meditate at the same time?"

§ "Meditating isn't a matter of making the mind empty, you know. The mind has to have work to do. If you make it empty, then anything—good or bad—can pop into it. It's like leaving the front door to your home open. Anything at all can come strolling right in."

§ A young nurse practiced meditation with Ajaan Fuang several days running, and finally asked him one day, "Why wasn't today's session as good as yesterday's?"

He answered: "Meditating is like wearing clothes. Today you wear white, tomorrow red, yellow, blue, whatever. You have to keep changing. You can't wear the same set of clothes all the time. So whatever color you're wearing, just be aware of it. Don't get depressed or excited about it."

§ A few months later the same nurse was sitting in meditation when a sense of peace and clarity in her mind became so intense that she felt she would never have a bad mood infiltrate her mind again. But sure enough, bad moods eventually came back as before. When she mentioned this to Ajaan Fuang, he said, "Looking after the mind is like raising a child. There will have to be bad days along with the good. If you want only the good, you're in for trouble. So you have to play neutral: Don't fall in with the good or the bad."

§ "When the meditation goes well, don't get excited. When it doesn't go well, don't get depressed. Simply be observant to see why it's good, why it's bad. If you can be observant like this, it won't be long before your meditation becomes a skill."

§ "Everything depends on your powers of observation. If they're crude and sloppy, you'll get nothing but crude and sloppy results. And your meditation will have no hope of making progress."

§ One day a young woman was sitting in meditation with Ajaan Fuang and everything seemed to go well. Her mind was clear and relaxed, and she could contemplate the elements in her body as he told her, step by step, with no problem at all. But the next day, nothing went right. After the session was over, he asked her, "How did it go today?"

She answered, "Yesterday I felt as if I were smart, today I feel like I'm stupid."

So he asked her further, "Are the smart person and the stupid person the same person or not?"

§ A student came to complain to Ajaan Fuang that she had been meditating for years, and still hadn't gotten anything out of it. His immediate response: "You don't meditate to 'get' anything. You meditate to let go."

§ The seamstress, after practicing meditation with Ajaan Fuang for several months, told him that her mind seemed more of a mess than it was before she began meditating. "Of course it does," he told her. "It's like your house. If you polish the floor every day, you won't be able to stand the least little bit of dust on it. The cleaner the house, the more easily you'll see the dirt. If you don't keep polishing the mind, you can let it go out and sleep in the mud without any qualms at all. But once you get it to sleep on a polished floor, then if there's even a speck of dust, you'll have to sweep it away. You won't be able to stand the mess."

§ "If you get excited by other people's experiences in meditation, it's like getting excited by other people's wealth. And what do you gain from that? Pay attention to developing your own wealth instead."

§ "Good will and compassion, if they aren't backed up by equanimity, can cause you to suffer. That's why you need the equanimity of *jhana* to perfect them."

§ "Your concentration has to be Right Concentration: just right, on an even keel, all the time. Whatever you do—sitting, standing, walking, lying down—don't let it have any ups and downs."

§ "Concentration: You have to learn how to do it, how to maintain it, and how to put it to use."

§ “Once you catch hold of the mind, it’ll stay in the present, without slipping off to the past or future. That’s when you’ll be able to make it do whatever you want.”

§ “When you get so that you catch on to the meditation, it’s like a kite that finally catches the wind. It won’t want to come down.”

§ One evening, after a work party at Wat Dhammasathit, Ajaan Fuang took his lay students up to the chedi to meditate. One woman in the group felt completely exhausted from all the work, but joined in the meditation anyway, out of deference to him. As she sat there, her awareness got weaker and weaker, smaller and smaller, to the point where she thought she was going to die. Ajaan Fuang happened to walk past and said, “There’s no need to be afraid of death. You die with every in and out breath.”

This gave her the strength to fight off her exhaustion, and to continue meditating.

§ “To meditate is to practice dying, so that you’ll be able to do it right.”

Breathing

§ When my father came for a visit to Wat Dhammasathit, I got him to sit and meditate with Ajaan Fuang, while I acted as interpreter. Before starting, my father asked if his being a Christian would be an obstacle to the meditation. Ajaan Fuang assured him that it wouldn't: "We're going to focus on the breath. The breath doesn't belong to Buddhism or Christianity or anyone else. It's common property all over the world, and everyone has the right to look at it. So try looking at the breath until you can see your own mind and know your own mind. Then the question of what religion you belong to won't be an issue, because we can talk about the mind instead of discussing religions. This way we can understand each other."

§ "When you do anything in meditation, relate it to the breath, for that's the basis of the entire skill we're developing."

§ "Catching the mind is like catching eels. If you simply jump down into the mud and try to grab hold of them, they'll slip off every which way. You have to find something they like—as when people take a dead dog, put it in a big clay jar and then bury it in the mud. In no time at all the eels come swimming into the jar of their own free will to feed off the dog, and then all you have to do it put your hand over the mouth of the jar and there you are: You've got your eels.

"It's the same with the mind. You have to find something it likes, so make the breath as comfortable as you can, to the point where it feels good throughout the whole body. The mind likes comfort, so it'll come of its own free will, and then it's easy to catch hold of it."

§ "You have to know the breath at all times, and then happiness will be yours. The human state, the heavenly state, and *nibbana* are all here in the breath. If you get carried away with other things, happiness will slip through your fingers, so you have to learn how to observe the in-and-out breath at all times. Pay attention to how it's getting along—don't leave it to fend for itself. When you know its way of life—sitting, standing, walking, everything—then you can get what you want from it. The body will be light, the mind at ease, happy at all times."

§ "The breath can take you all the way to *nibbana,* you know."

§ "The first step is simply to look at the breath as it is. You don't have to go fiddling around with it a lot. Just think *bud-* with the in-breath, and *dho* with the out. *Bud-* in, *dho* out. Don't force the breath, or force the mind into a trance. Simply hold the mind carefully right there with each breath."

§ "How do you use your powers of observation to get acquainted with the breath? Ask yourself: Do you know the breath? Is the breath there? If you can't

see whether the breath is for real, look further in until it's clearly there. There's no great mystery to it. It's always real, right there. The important thing is whether or not *you're* for real. If you are, then simply keep at it. That's all there is to it. Simply keep being real, being true in what you do, and your meditation will make progress. It'll gradually grow stronger, and the mind will grow calm. Just be clear about what you're doing. Don't have any doubts. If you can doubt even your own breath, then there are no two ways about it: You'll doubt everything. No matter what happens, you'll be uncertain about it. So be straightforward and true in whatever you do, for everything comes down to whether or not you're true."

§ "Once the mind stays with the breath, you don't have to repeat *buddho* in the mind. It's like calling your water buffalo. Once it comes, why keep calling its name?"

§ "Make the mind and the breath one and the same. Don't let them be two."

§ "Don't be a post planted in the mud. Have you ever seen a post planted in the mud? It sways back and forth and can never stand firm. Whatever you do, be firm and single-minded about it. Like when you focus on the breath: Make the mind one with it, like a post planted firmly in solid rock."

§ "Hold onto the breath the way a red ant bites: Even if you pull its body so that it separates from the head, the head will keep on biting and won't let go."

§ When I first heard Ajaan Fuang talk about "catching hold" of the breath, I didn't understand him. I'd sit tensing up my body to catch hold of it, but this simply made me feel tired and ill at ease. Then one day, as I was riding the bus to Wat Makut, I sat in concentration and found that if I let the breath follow its natural course, it felt a lot more comfortable, and the mind wouldn't run away from it. When I reached Wat Makut, being a typical Westerner, I took him to task, "Why do you say to catch the breath? The more you catch it, the more uncomfortable it is. You have to let it go to flow naturally."

He laughed and said, "That isn't what I meant. To 'catch it' means to stick with it, to follow it and to make sure you don't wander away from it. You don't have to squeeze or force or control it. Whatever it's like, just keep on watching it."

§ "Get so that you really *know* the breath, not just that you're simply aware of it."

§ "Observing the breath is the cause, the pleasure that arises is the result. Focus as much as you can on the cause. If you ignore the cause and get carried away with the result, it'll run out and you'll end up with nothing at all."

§ "When you focus on the breath, measure things by how much pleasure you feel. If both the breath and the mind feel pleasant, you're doing okay. If either the breath or the mind feels uncomfortable, that's when you have to make adjustments."

§ "The main thing when you meditate is to be observant. If you feel ill at ease, change the breath until you feel better. If the body feels heavy, think of spreading the breath so that it feels light. Tell yourself that the breath can come in and out every pore of your skin."

§ "When the book says to focus on the breath sensations in the different parts of the body, it means to focus on whatever feelings are already there in the body."

§ "The breath can be a resting place for the mind, or it can be what the mind actively contemplates. When the mind isn't willing to settle down and be still, it's a sign that it wants exercise. So we give it work to do. We make it scan the body and contemplate the breath sensations in the different parts to see how they're related to the in-and-out breath, to see where the energy flows smoothly and where it's blocked. But make sure that your mind doesn't wander outside of the body. Keep it circling around inside and don't let it stop until it gets tired. Once it's tired you can find a place for it to rest, and it'll stay there without your having to force it."

§ "Make the breath viscous and then think of it exploding to fill the whole body."

§ Ajaan Fuang once told a student who liked to keep in shape with yoga and aerobic exercises every day: "Use the breath to keep in shape instead. Sit in meditation and spread the breath throughout the body, to every part. The mind will get trained and the body will be strong with no need to tie it into knots or make it jump around."

§ A nun who practiced meditation with Ajaan Fuang had had poor health since she was a child, and was always coming down with one disease or another. Ajaan Fuang told her: "Every morning when you wake up, sit and meditate to give yourself a physical examination, to see where the aches and pains are, and then use your breathing to treat them. The heavy pains will grow lighter; the light ones will disappear. But don't make a big deal out of whether or not they disappear. Keep on examining the body and dealing with the breath no matter what happens, because the important point is that you're training your mindfulness to stay with the body, to the point where it's strong enough to go above and beyond pain."

§ "Adjust the breath until it's perfectly even. If you see a white light, bring it into the body and let it explode out to every pore. The mind will be still; the body weightless. You'll feel white and bright all over, and your heart will be at ease."

§ "When the breath fills the body, it's like water filling a jar to the brim. Even though you may try to pour more into it, that's all it can take. It's just right, in and of itself."

§ "Meditation needs rapture—a feeling of fullness in body and mind—as its lubricant. Otherwise it gets too dry."

§ "When you meditate you have to let go in stages. Like when they go into outer space: The space capsule has to let go of the booster rockets before it can reach the moon."

§ "When the mind is really in place you can let go of the breath, and it won't wander off anywhere. It's like pouring cement: If the cement hasn't set, you can't remove the plywood forms, but once it's set, it'll stay where it is without any need for the forms at all."

§ "Spread the breath until the body and mind are so light that there's no sense of body at all—just awareness itself. The mind will be clear like crystal clean water. You can look down into the water and see your own face. You'll be able to see what's going on in your mind."

§ "When the breath is full and still, you let go of it. Then you think of each of the other elements in the body—fire, water, and earth—one by one. When they're all clear you put them together, i.e. balance them so that the body isn't too hot, too cold, too heavy too light: just right in every way. Now you let go of that and stay with the space element—a feeling of emptiness. When you're skilled at staying with space, look at what's saying "space". This is where you turn to look at awareness itself, the element of consciousness. Once the mind has become one like this, you can then let go of the oneness, and see what's left.

"After you can do this, you practice going in and out of the various stages until you're skilled at it, and you can notice the various modes of the mind as you do it. That's where discernment will begin to appear."

§ "In contemplating yourself, the six elements have to come first. You take them apart and put them back together again, as when you learn your ABC's and how to make them into words. After a while you can make any word you want."

§ "Take your time to make sure that this foundation is solid. Once it's solid, then no matter how many stories you want to build on top of it, they'll go up quickly and stay in place."

§ "If you were to say it's easy, well yes, it's easy. If you were to say it's hard, it's hard. It all depends on you."

§ "The basic steps of breath meditation that Ajaan Lee describes in his Method 2 are just the main outline of the practice. As for the details, you have to use your own ingenuity to work variations on his outline so that it fits your experiences. That's when you'll get results."

§ "If you're having any problems in your concentration, check what you're doing against the seven steps in Method 2. I've found that if anyone comes to me with problems in their concentration, all I have to do is apply one of the seven steps. They're basic to all meditation."

§ "The texts say that breath meditation is right for everyone, but that's not really the case. Only if you're meticulous can you get results from focusing on the breath."

§ "A famous meditation teacher once criticized Ajaan Lee: 'Why do you teach people to look at the breath? What is there to look at? There's just in and out. How are they going to gain discernment from looking at just that?' He answered, 'If that's all they see, that's all they'll get.' This is a question that comes from not knowing how to look."

§ "People of discernment can take anything at all and put it to good use."

Visions & Signs

§ One year—when Ajaan Fuang was seeing a Chinese doctor in Bangkok for his skin disease and staying at Wat Asokaram—a group of nuns and lay people came to practice meditation with him every night. Some members of the group would report having this or that vision in the course of their meditation, and finally one of the nuns complained: "I know that my mind isn't slipping off anywhere; it's staying right with the breath all the time, so why aren't I having any visions like everyone else?"

Ajaan Fuang answered her, "Do you know how lucky you are? With people who have visions, this, that, and the other thing is always coming in to interfere. But you don't have any old karma to get in the way of your meditation, so you can focus directly on the mind without having to get involved with any outside things at all."

§ "Don't be amazed by people with visions. Visions are nothing else but dreams. There are true ones and false ones. You can't really trust them."

§ A Bangkok housewife who was practicing meditation with Ajaan Fuang heard some of his other students say that meditation without visions was the straight path. It so happened that she had frequent visions in her meditation, and so hearing this made her wonder why her path was so winding and convoluted. When she asked Ajaan Fuang about this, he told her: "Having visions in your meditation is like having lots of lush wild greens growing along the side of your path. You can gather them as you go along, so that you'll have something to eat along the way, and you'll reach the end of the path just like everyone else. As for other people, they might see the greens without gathering them, or may not even see them at all—because their path goes through arid land."

§ "People who practice concentration fall into two groups: those who have signs via the eyes when their minds settle down, and those who have signs via the body. People in the first group are the ones who see visions of people, animals, whatever. Those in the second group don't have visions, but when their minds settle down, their bodies will feel unusually heavy or light, large or small, etc. When these people focus on the elements in their body, they'll notice them as feelings: warmth, coolness, heaviness, spaciousness, and so forth.

"If I'm teaching people like this how to meditate, I don't have to worry about them too much, because there aren't many dangers in their path—aside from the danger of their getting discouraged because they don't see anything happening in their meditation. The ones I worry about are those in the first group, because they have lots of dangers. Their visions can lead them to jump to all sorts of false conclusions. If they don't learn the right way to deal with their visions, they'll get stuck on them and never be able to reach any higher level than that."

§ "Visions—or whatever things appear in the course of your meditation: It's not the case that you shouldn't pay any attention to them, for some kinds of visions have important messages. So when things like this appear, you have to look into how they're appearing, why they're appearing, and for what purpose."

§ "People who have visions have a double-edged sword in their hands, so they have to be careful. The things that appear have their uses and their dangers. So learn how to squeeze out their uses and leave the dangers behind."

§ Usually if any of Ajaan Fuang's students saw a vision of their own body in meditation, he'd have them divide it up in the vision into the four elements—earth, water, wind, and fire—or into its 32 basic parts, and then set fire to it until it was nothing but ashes. If the same vision reappeared, he'd have them deal with it the same way again until they were quick at it.

One of his students, a nun, was practicing this sort of meditation every day, but as soon as she had divided the body into its 32 parts and was getting ready to set fire to it, another image of her body would appear right next to the first. As soon as she was getting ready to cremate the second one, another one would appear right next to it, and then another, and another, like fish lined up on a platter waiting to be grilled. As she looked at them she felt fed up with the idea of continuing, but when she mentioned this to Ajaan Fuang, he told her, "The whole purpose in doing this is to get fed up, but not fed up with the doing."

§ Another technique Ajaan Fuang taught for dealing with an image of one's own body would be to focus on what it looked like the first week in the womb, the second week, the third, and so on to the day of birth; then the first month after that, the second month, the first year, the second year, and so on up until old age and death.

One woman was trying this technique, but it seemed too slow to her, so she focused on five- and ten-year intervals instead. When Ajaan Fuang found out, he told her, "You're skipping over all the important parts," and then made up a new set of rules: "Think of your head and then think of pulling out one hair at a time and placing it in the palm of your hand. See how much you can pull out, and then replant it one hair at a time. If you haven't finished, don't leave your meditation until you do. If you want to pull it out in bunches, okay, but you have to replant it one hair at a time. You have to go into the details like this if you want to gain anything good from it."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students asked him, "Why is it that the intuitions I get from my concentration come in such short flashes, without letting me catch the whole picture?" He answered, "When they put a record on a record player, the needle has to keep bearing down continually if you're going to hear the whole story. If you don't keep bearing down, how can you expect to know anything?"

§ Another student was sitting in meditation with Ajaan Fuang when she saw an image of a dead person in her concentration, asking for a share of some of the

merit from her practice. This made her feel creepy, so she told Ajaan Fuang, "There's a ghost in front of me, Than Phaw."

"That's not a ghost," he responded. "That's a person."

"No, it's really a ghost," she insisted.

"If that's a ghost," he said, "then you're a ghost. If you see it as a person, then you can be a person, too."

§ After that, he told her to spread thoughts of loving-kindness if she saw anything like that again, and the image would go away. So from that point on, that's what she'd do, at the drop of a hat, the minute she saw an image of a dead person in her meditation. When Ajaan Fuang found out about this, he taught her, "Wait a minute. Don't be in such a hurry to get rid of them. First look at what condition they're in and then ask them what karma they did to become that way. If you do this, you'll begin to gain some insight into the Dhamma."

§ Several weeks later she had a vision of an emaciated woman holding a tiny child. The woman was wearing nothing but dirty rags, and the child was crying without stop. The student asked the woman in her vision what she had done to be so miserable, and the answer was that she had tried to have an abortion, but both she and the child had died as a result. Hearing this, the student couldn't help feeling sorry for them, but no matter how much she spread thoughts of loving kindness to them, it didn't seem to help them at all, because their karma was so heavy.

This had her upset, so she told Ajaan Fuang. He replied, "Whether or not they can receive your help is their business, and none of yours. Different people have different karma, and some are beyond help for the time being. You give what you can, but you don't have to go back and make an official inquiry into how things turned out. Do your duty and leave it at that. They ask for help, you give them what you can. They appear for you to see so that you'll learn more about the results of karma. That's enough. Once you're finished, go back to the breath."

§ She kept following Ajaan Fuang's instructions until one day it occurred to her, "If I keep giving, giving, giving like this, will I have anything left for myself?" When she told her doubts to Ajaan Fuang, he gave her a blank look for a second and then said, "Boy, you really can be narrow-hearted when you want to be, can't you?" Then he explained: "Loving-kindness isn't a thing, like money, that the more you give, the less you have. It's more like having a lit candle in your hand. This person asks to light his candle from yours, that person asks to light hers. The more candles you light, the brighter it is for everyone—including you."

§ Time passed and one day she had a vision of a dead man asking her to tell his children and grandchildren to make merit in such and such a way and to dedicate it to him. When she left meditation, she asked permission to go inform the dead man's children, but Ajaan Fuang said, "What for? You're not a mailman. Even if you were, he doesn't have any money to pay your wages. What

kind of proof are you going to give them that what you say is true? If they believe you, you're going to get carried away and think that you're some special kind of psychic. Everywhere you go, you'll keep smiling this little smile to yourself. And if they don't believe you, you know what they'll say, don't you?"

"What, Than Phaw?"

"They'll say that you're crazy."

§ "There are true visions and false visions. So whenever you see one, just sit still and watch it. Don't get pulled into following it."

§ "You should watch visions the same way you watch TV: Just watch it, without getting pulled inside the tube."

§ Some of Ajaan Fuang's students would have visions of themselves or their friends in previous lifetimes and get all excited about what they saw. When they'd report their visions to Ajaan Fuang, he'd warn them, "You aren't still wrapped up in the past, are you? You're foolish if you are. You've been born and died countless aeons. If you took the bones of all your past bodies and piled them up, they'd be taller than Mount Sumeru. The water in all the oceans is less than the water of the tears you've shed over all the sufferings, big and small, you've been through. If you reflect on this with real discernment, you'll feel disenchanted with states of being, and no longer take pleasure in birth. Your mind will aim straight for *nibbana."*

§ In 1976 Ajaan Fuang gained large numbers of new students. One of them wondered why this was the case, and so asked herself about it in her meditation. The answer came to her that Ajaan Fuang had had many children in a previous lifetime, and now they had been reborn as his students.

When she left meditation, she asked him why this was so, figuring that he'd tell her that he had once been a king with a large harem, but instead he said, "I was probably a fish in the sea, laying who knows how many eggs at a time."

§ One evening a schoolteacher was meditating at home and began remembering her previous lives, all the way back to the time of King Asoka. In her vision she saw King Asoka beating her father mercilessly over a trivial infraction of palace etiquette. The next morning she went to tell Ajaan Fuang about her vision, and it was obvious that she was still furious with King Asoka for what she had seen him do.

Ajaan Fuang didn't affirm or deny the truth of her vision. Instead, he spoke to her anger in the present, "Here you've been carrying this grudge for over 2,000 years, and where is it getting you? Go ask forgiveness of him in your mind and have done with it."

§ "It's good that most people can't remember their previous lives. Otherwise things would be a lot more complicated than they already are."

§ One woman, who at that point wasn't yet a student of Ajaan Fuang, was practicing meditation at home on her own when she had a vision of a sentence—somewhat like Pali, but not quite—appearing in her meditation. So she copied it down and went from wat to wat, asking various monks to translate it for her. No one could until she met one monk who told her that it was in arahant language, and only an arahant could understand what it said. Then he had the gall to translate it for her, after which he told her to bring him any other sentences she got from her visions, and he'd translate them, too.

She wasn't completely convinced of what he had said, and happened to mention it to Ajaan Fuang when she first met him. His response: "What? Arahant language? The minds of arahants are above and beyond conventions. What kind of language would a mind like that have?"

§ "People for the most part don't like the truth. They prefer make-believe instead."

§ There were occasions when some of Ajaan Fuang's students would gain knowledge of one sort or another in their visions, get carried away with it, and yet he wouldn't take them to task. One day the seamstress asked him why he didn't warn such people that their practice was going off course, and he told her, "You have to look at how mature they are. If they're really adults, you can tell them straight out. If their minds are still infants, you have to let them play for a while, like a child with a new toy. If you're too harsh with them, they might get discouraged and give up completely. As they begin to mature they're sure to start seeing for themselves what's proper and what's not."

§ "Don't have anything to do with the past or the future. Just stay with the present—that's enough. And even though that's where you're supposed to stay, you're not supposed to latch onto it. So why do think you should latch on to things where you're not even supposed to stay?"

§ "You know that you shouldn't believe even your own visions, so why go believing the visions of others?"

§ "If you can't let go of your visions, you'll never gain release."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students asked him, "When you see something in a vision, how can you know whether it's true or false?"

His answer: "Even when it's true, it's true only in terms of convention. You have to get your mind beyond both true and false."

§ "The purpose of the practice is to make the heart pure. All these other things are just games and entertainment."

Right at Awareness

§ "Whatever you experience, simply be aware of it. You don't have to take after it. The primal heart has no characteristics. It's aware of everything. But as soon as things make contact, within or without, they cause a lapse in mindfulness, so that we let go of awareness, forget awareness in and of itself, and take on all the characteristics of the things that come later. Then we act out in line with them—becoming happy, sad or whatever. The reason we're this way is because we take conventional truths and latch on to them tight. If we don't want to be under their influence, we'll have to stay with primal awareness at all times. This requires a great deal of mindfulness."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students was feeling mistreated by the world, and so went to him for consolation. He told her, "What's there to feel mistreated about? *You're* the one that's swayed under the events that have hit you, that's all. Contemplate what's happening and you'll see that the mind is something separate. Events come passing in and then go passing by. So why be influenced by them? Keep your mind right at the simple awareness that these things come and soon they'll be gone, so why follow them?"

§ "What, really, is yours? When you die, you won't be able to take any of these things with you, so why waste time wanting anything? There's nothing you have to want at all. Make your mind quiet. Make it one. You don't have to concern yourself with your own attainments or those of other people. Simply be aware. That's enough."

§ "Whenever anything hits you, let it go only as far as 'aware'. Don't let it go all the way into the heart."

§ "All you need to do is keep your sense of simple awareness solid and strong, and nothing will be able to overwhelm you."

§ "Stay with awareness itself at all times—except when you sleep. The minute you wake up, stay right at awareness, and it won't be long before discernment arises."

§ One woman who practiced meditation with Ajaan Fuang came to feel that she had split into two people: one person acting, and one watching. She felt this way both while sitting in meditation and while she wasn't—to the point where she didn't feel like sitting in meditation at all, because she felt that sitting and not sitting were in no way different. She asked him about this, and he told her, "If you don't want to, you don't have to sit. Just keep this sense of 'the watcher' going at all times. Sitting with your eyes closed is simply an external convention. Just keep watching. When the mind and the body become separate like this, the

body can't press on the mind. If the body presses on the mind, the mind will have to be under the influence of what goes on in the body."

§ "Right awareness has to be paired with the breath."

§ "To be aware means to be aware as soon as defilement arises, to see defilement and not act under its power."

§ "There's no past here, and no future, only the present. No man, no woman, no sign of any kind at all. There's nothing, not even self. What self there is, is only in a conventional sense."

§ "Once awareness is solid, you have to get above and beyond it."

§ In 1978, one of Ajaan Fuang's students had to move to Hong Kong, and so he set up a small meditation center there. In one of his letters he asked Ajaan Fuang to write out a short outline of the main points of the practice, and this was the answer he received:

"Focus on all six of the elements: earth, water, wind, fire, space, and consciousness. When you're acquainted with each of them, meld them into one, and focus on them until they grow stable and strong. Your energy will gather together until both the body and the mind feel full. When the physical elements are balanced and in harmony, they'll grow full, and the mind will let go of them on its own and turn to oneness. The elements will be one, the mind will be one. So now you turn your attention to the mind. Focus on the mind until you become fully aware of it. Then let go of that awareness, together with whatever knowledge you've gained, and there won't be anything left. Let go even of the events in the present that you're aware of. That's when intuitive discernment will arise, and meditation comes to an end."

§ One night Ajaan Fuang took a group of his students up to sit in meditation at the chedi on top of the hill in Wat Dhammasathit. Looking out to the south, in the inky darkness, they could see the bright lights of the fishing boats far out at sea. He commented, "When you're up on a high place like this, you can see everything." For one woman listening, this had special meaning, because she knew he wasn't referring just to the view from the hill.

Contemplation

§ "Everything that happens to you has its causes. Once you contemplate it skillfully until you know its causes, you'll be able to get past it."

§ "Our defilements have made us suffer enough already. Now it's our turn to make *them* suffer."

§ There are two kinds of people: those who like to think and those who don't. When people who don't like to think start meditating, you have to force them to contemplate things. If you don't force them, they'll simply get stuck like a stump in concentration, and won't get anywhere at all. As for those who like to think, they really have to use force to get their minds to settle down. But once they've mastered concentration, you don't have to force them to contemplate. Whatever strikes the mind, they're sure to contemplate it right away."

§ "The discernment that can let go of defilement is a special discernment, not ordinary discernment. It needs concentration as its basis if it's going to let go."

§ "For insight to arise, you have to use your own strategies. You can't use other people's strategies and expect to get the same results they did."

§ "When insights arise, don't try to remember them. If they're real insights, they'll stay with you. If you try to memorize them, they'll turn into labels and concepts, and will get in the way of new insights arising."

§ A meditator in Singapore once wrote a letter to Ajaan Fuang, describing how he applied the Buddha's teachings to everyday life: Whatever his mind focused on, he would try to see it as inconstant, stressful, and not self. Ajaan Fuang had me write a letter in response, saying, "Do things ever say that they're inconstant, stressful, and not self? They never say it, so don't go faulting them that way. Focus on what labels them, for that's where the fault lies."

§ "Even though your views may be right, if you cling to them you're wrong."

§ The wife of a Navy lieutenant was meditating at home when suddenly she had an urge to give Ajaan Fuang a good tongue-lashing. No matter how much she tried to drive the thought out of her mind, she couldn't. Several days later she went to ask his forgiveness, and he told her, "The mind can think good thoughts, so why can't it think bad thoughts? Whatever it's thinking, just watch it—but if the thoughts are bad, make sure you don't act in line with them."

§ A high school student once said that in practicing meditation, if his mind thought good thoughts he'd let them pass, but if it thought bad thoughts he'd put a stop to them right away. Ajaan Fuang told him, "Just watch them. See who

it is that's thinking good thoughts and bad thoughts. The good thoughts and bad thoughts will disappear on their own, because they fall under the Three Characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-self."

§ "If the mind is going to think, let it think, but don't fall for its thoughts."

§ "The defilements are like duckweed. You have to keep pushing them out of the way so that you can see the clear water underneath. If you don't keep pushing them aside, they'll move in to cover the water again—but at least you know that the water underneath them is clear."

§ A woman complained to Ajaan Fuang that she had been meditating for a long time but still couldn't cut any of her defilements. He laughed and said, "You don't have to cut them. Do you think you can? The defilements were part and parcel of this world long before you came. You were the one who came looking for them. Whether or not you come, they exist on their own. And who says that they're defilements? Have they ever told you their names? They simply go their own way. So try to get acquainted with them. See both their good and their bad sides."

§ One day Ajaan Fuang was explaining to a new student how to watch the arising and passing away of the defilements. It so happened that she was a veteran reader of many Dhamma books, so she offered her opinion: "Instead of just looking at them this way, shouldn't I try to uproot them?"

"If all you can think of is uprooting them," he replied, "their fruit just might fall on the ground and start growing again."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students told him that she had reached the point in her meditation where she felt indifferent to everything she encountered. He warned her, "Sure, you can be indifferent as long as you don't run into anything that goes straight to the heart."

§ "Everyone lives with suffering, suffering, suffering, but they don't comprehend suffering, which is why they can't free themselves from it."

§ "Those who know don't suffer. Those who don't know are the ones who suffer. There's suffering in every life—as long as there are the five *khandhas*, there has to be suffering—but if you really come to know, you can live in ease."

§ "When you're sick you have a golden opportunity. You can contemplate the pains that arise from your illness. Don't simply lie there. Meditate at the same time. Contemplate the behavior of the pains as they arise. Don't let the mind fall in with them."

§ One of Ajaan Fuang's students was taking cobalt treatments for cancer until she developed an allergic reaction to the anesthesia. The doctors were at a loss as to what to do, so she suggested that they try the treatment without the anesthesia. At first they were reluctant to do so, but when she assured them that

she could use the power of her meditation to withstand the pain, they finally agreed to give it a try.

After the treatment Ajaan Fuang visited her at the hospital. She told him that she had been able to concentrate her mind so as to endure the pain, but it had left her exhausted. He advised her: "You can use the power of concentration to fight off pain, but it squanders your energy. You have to approach the pain with discernment, to see that it's not you. It's not yours. Your awareness is one thing, the pain is something separate. When you can see it in this way, things will be easier."

§ Several months later the same woman went to hear a famous Bangkok monk give a sermon on the cycle of life, death, and rebirth as an ocean of suffering. It had a profound effect on her, and afterwards she went to visit Ajaan Fuang and told him about it. As she was speaking, the image of the ocean struck her as so overwhelming that tears came to her eyes, so he said, "Now that you know it's an ocean, why don't you just cross over to the other side?" That was enough to stop her tears.

§ "The Buddha didn't teach us to cure our pains. He taught us to comprehend them."

§ "It's true that illness can be an obstacle to your meditation, but if you're intelligent enough to take illness as your teacher, you'll see that the body is a nest of illnesses, and that you shouldn't cling to it as yours. You can then uproot the attachments that are concerned about the body—because nothing in it is yours at all. It's simply a tool for you to use to make good karma and pay off your old bad karma debts as you are able."

§ "When you focus on seeing pain and stress, you have to get to the subtle levels—to the point where you see that stress arises the instant you open your eyes and see things."

§ Advice for a woman who had to live with one illness after another: "Use your mindfulness to contemplate the body until you can visualize it as bones falling down in a heap, and you can set them on fire until there's nothing left. Then ask yourself: Is that your self? Then why does it make you suffer and feel pain? Is there any 'you' in there? Keep looking until you reach the true core of the Dhamma—until there's nothing of yours at all. The mind will then see itself as it really is, and let go of its own accord."

§ "Tell yourself: The reason I still feel suffering is because I still have an 'I'."

§ "The day will arrive when death comes to you, forcing you to let go of everything of every sort. That's why you should practice letting go well in advance so that you can be good at it. Otherwise—let me tell you—it's going to be difficult when the time comes."

§ "You don't have to be afraid of death. You'd do better to be afraid of birth."

§ “When you die don’t get caught up on the symptoms of dying.

§ “Lift the mind above what it knows.”

§ “Whatever dies, let it die, but don’t let the heart die.”

Realization

§ A tape-recorded talk given to one of his students who had reached an impasse in her meditation.

Once the mind is firmly established in the breath, you then try to separate the mind from its object—from the breath itself. Focus on this: The breath is an element, part of the wind element. Awareness of the breath is something else. So you've got two things that have come together. Now, when you can separate them—through realizing the breath's true nature as an element—the mind can stand on its own. After all, the breath isn't you, and you aren't the breath. When you can separate things in this way, the mind gains power. It's set loose from the breath, and is wise to the breath's every aspect. When mindfulness is full, it's wise to all the aspects of the breath, and can separate itself from them.

Now if it so happens that your mind is strong and your mindfulness sharp while you're doing this, that's when insight occurs. The knowledge will arise in that moment, letting you know that you've really let go. If your mindfulness is still weak, though, you won't be able to let go. Only when your mindfulness is really resilient will you have mindfulness and insight arising together.

This is something you have to keep contemplating whenever you have the chance. When you can separate the mind from its objects, it'll be freed from all its burdens. So focus your attention right down, in the area of the heart. Keep it focused there, and then observe the breath and what it is that's *aware* of the breath. Be as observant as you can, and eventually you'll see that they separate from each other. When they've separated, that gives you the chance to investigate further inside. And once you've investigated this one element, you'll find that what you learn applies to everything else.

When you investigate the breath, you'll find that it's not a being, not a person—so what is there to latch on to? You can't latch on to it as your self, for it simply goes its own way. When you look at the breath, you'll see that it doesn't have a body—no head, no legs, no hands, no feet, nothing at all. When you see this, you let go of it, in line with the way it really is.

The texts say, *'Cago patinissaggo mutti analayo':* You move out of the breath. You remove your concerns for it. You don't make it your home any longer—because it's not yours. You let it go in line with its original nature. You give it back. *Whatever it's got, you give it back to nature.* All of the elements—earth, water, wind, fire, and space—you give back to nature. You let them return to what they originally were. When you examine all five of these things, you'll see that they're not a being, not a person, not 'us', not 'them'. You let them all return to their original nature in every way.

This then brings us to the mind, what it is that's aware of these five elements. *What is it going to stay with now?* Turn your powers of observation on this knowing element that is now standing on its own, with nothing else left. Examine it to see what's what, and that's when another level of insight will arise.

If you want to gain the insight that will let go of all things in line with their original nature, there has to be a special realization that arises in the act of letting go. If there isn't this realization, your letting go is simply an ordinary, everyday label or perception. It's mundane discernment. But when this special realization arises in the act of letting go—the instant you let go, the result comes right back at you, verifying, certifying what's happened for what it really is: You know. You've let go. You then experience the purity within you.

This is called transcendent discernment. When the realization arises within you, verifying what you've seen and what you've done, that's called transcendent discernment. As long as this realization doesn't arise, your discernment is still mundane. So you keep working at your investigation into things until all the conditions are ripe. Then when they're ripe, there's nothing more you have to do, for transcendent discernment penetrates things completely the very instant it arises. It's not like mundane discernment at all.

The path we follow, then, is to be observant, to investigate things. Keep making a focused investigation until you reach the strategic point. When the mind reaches that point, it lets go on its own. What happens is that it reaches a point of fullness—the Dhamma within it is full—and it lets go. Once it lets go, the results will appear immediately.

So. Keep on practicing. There's nothing to be afraid of. You'll *have* to reap results, there's no doubt about it. You reap results all along the way. Like right now, while you're sitting in meditation here. You know that the breath and the mind are comfortable with each other. That's a result of the practice. Even though you haven't yet reached the end of the path, you're still gaining a sense of comfort and ease in your meditation. The mind is at peace with the in-and-out breath. As long as the mind and breath can't separate from each other, they have to help each other along. The mind helps the breath, and the breath helps the mind until they can get fully acquainted. Once the mind gets fully acquainted, it can let go. When it knows, it lets go. As long as it doesn't really know, it won't really let go.

What this means is that you have to associate with the breath, spend time with it, and gradually come to know it. As the mind gets more and more acquainted, it will be able to unravel its attachments to body, feelings, perceptions, thought-constructs, and consciousness. Its identity-views—seeing these things as the self—will fall away. This is the way to freedom. The moment this transcendent discernment arises, you'll be free. You'll be able to disentangle yourself from all the conventional truths of the world that say, 'person', 'self', 'man', 'woman', 'us', 'them', and so on.

But as long as you can't yet let go, you still have to depend on these things. They're your resting spots, *but not your refuge.* You simply lean on each other, and help each other along, so that you can make progress on your way. You can't abandon these things, for they're the path of your practice. As long as you stick with the practice, you won't fall back. But as soon as you let up on the practice, you'll start backsliding immediately. You'll fall prey to doubts, wondering whether or not the Dhamma is true.

You have to keep being observant of the mind: awareness itself. It's not the case that the mind isn't aware, you know. Its basic nature is awareness. Just look at it. It's aware of everything—aware, but it can't yet let go of its perceptions, of the conventions it holds to be true. So you have to focus your investigation on in. Focus on in until the mind and its objects separate from each other. Simply keep at it. If you're persistent like this, without let-up, your doubts will gradually fade away, fade away, and eventually you'll reach your true refuge within you, the basic awareness called *buddha* that sees clearly through everything. This is the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha appearing within you as your ultimate refuge.

This is when you'll know what's actually within, what's actually without, what's actually a resting spot, and what's really your refuge. You'll be able to distinguish these things.

Things outside are simply resting spots. Like the body: It's a resting spot. For the brief moment that the elements of earth, water, wind, and fire stay balanced together, you can rest with the body. But as for your true refuge, you've already seen it. It's this basic awareness itself, within the mind. Your awareness of the breath is a refuge on one level. When it separates from the breath, it's a refuge on another level. And as for your true refuge—*buddha*—that's the awareness that lies further within. Once you realize this, that's all there is. It's sovereign in and of itself. It knows clearly and truly, all around. That's the true refuge within you.

As for things outside, they're just temporary supports, things you can depend on for a little while, like a crutch. As long as there's the breath to keep them alive, you make use of them. When there's no more breath, that's the end of the problem. The physical elements separate and no longer depend on each other, so the mind returns to its own true refuge. And where is that? Just where is that *buddha* awareness? When we've trained the mind to be its own refuge, there will be no sorrow at that moment in the meditating heart.

The Buddha's own search was for this refuge. He taught all of his disciples to take refuge in themselves, for we can depend on others only for a little while. Other people merely show us the way. But if you want what's really true and good in life, you have to depend on yourself—teach yourself, train yourself, depend on yourself in every way. Your sufferings come eventually from you. Your happiness, eventually from you. It's like eating: If you don't eat, how are you going to get full? If you leave it up to other people to eat, there's no way you're going to get full. If you want to be full, you yourself have to eat. It's the same with the practice.

You can't let yourself latch on to things outside you. Things outside are inconstant. Impermanent. Undependable. They change with every in-and-out breath. This holds not only for you, but for everyone. If you don't part from one another while you're still alive, you part when you die. You part from things with every in-and-out breath. You can't base the meaning of your life on these things—*and you don't have to.* You can simply tell yourself that this is the way things are all over the world. The world offers nothing lasting. We don't want things to be that way, but that's the way they are. They don't lie under anyone's control at all. This is true not only with things outside, but also with things within you. You want the body to stay alive, you don't want it to die, but it's going to die. You don't want it to change, but it changes, constantly.

This is why you have to get your mind in shape so that it can take refuge in itself, in line with the principles of the skill the Buddha taught. And you don't have to feel doubts about the practice, for all the qualities you need to develop in the practice are already present within you. All forms of good and evil are present within you. You already know which path is the good one, which path is the shoddy one, so all you have to do is train your heart to hold onto the good path. Stop and take a look at yourself right now: Are you on the right path? Whatever is wrong, don't latch onto it. Let go of it. Past, future, whatever, let go of it, leaving only the present. Keep the mind open and at ease in the present at all times, and then start investigating.

You already know that things outside aren't you or yours, but inside you there are many levels you have to examine. Many levels you have to examine. Even the mind isn't really yours. There are still inconstant and stressful things inside it. Sometimes it wants to do this, sometimes to do that, it's not really yours. So don't get too attached to it.

Thought-constructs are the big issue. Sometimes they form good thoughts, sometimes evil thoughts, even though you know better. You don't want to think those things, and yet they keep appearing in the mind, in spite of your intentions. So you have to regard them as not being yours. Examine them. There's nothing dependable about them. They don't last. They're impersonal events, so let them go in line with their own nature.

And what *is* there that's lasting, solid, dependable, and true? Keep looking on in. Focus your mindfulness on the breath, and ask yourself right there. Eventually you'll come to see what's what within you. Whenever you have any doubts or problems in the practice, focus down on the breath and ask the mind right there, and understanding will arise, to loosen up your wrong views and help you past your impasse.

But even this understanding is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. *Sabbe dhamma anatta:* Everything that arises, the Buddha said, is inconstant and not self. Even the understandings that arise in the mind aren't constant. Sometimes they arise, sometimes they don't. So don't get too attached to them. When they arise, take note of them, and then let them follow their own course. Let your views be Right Views: i.e., just right, not going overboard. If you go overboard with them, you latch on tight to them, and then they turn wrong on you, for you've lost sight of what you're doing.

What this all boils down to is that the more mindfulness in your practice, the better. As your mindfulness gets more and more mature, more and more complete, it turns into something transcendent. The transcendent discernment we mentioned above arises from the power of your mindfulness as it becomes more and more complete.

So keep training your mindfulness until it's Great Mindfulness. Try to keep it constant, persistent, and focused, until you see all things for what they are. That's how you'll advance in the Buddha's teachings.

Release

§ "Our practice is to go against the stream, against the flow. And where are we going? To the source of the stream. That's the 'cause' side of the practice. The 'result' side is that we can let go and be completely at ease."

§ "The stages of the practice... Actually the different stages don't say what they are. We simply make up names for them. As long as you stay stuck on these made-up names, you'll never get free."

§ "When teaching people, you have to teach them in line with their temperaments and aptitudes, but eventually they all come to the same point: letting go."

§ *"Nibbana* is subtle and takes a lot of discernment. It's not something that the force of desire can reach. If we could get there through the force of desire, everyone in the world would have gotten there by now."

§ "Some people talk about, 'temporary *nibbana,* temporary *nibbana,'* but how can *nibbana* be temporary? If it's *nibbana,* it has to be constant. If it's not constant, it's not *nibbana."*

§ "When they say that *nibbana* is empty, they mean that it's empty of defilement."

§ "Right where there's no one to be pained, no one to die. Right there. It's in each and every person. It's as if your hand were palm-down, and you turn it palm-up—but only people of discernment will be able to do it. If you're dense, you won't see it, you won't catch on to it, you won't go beyond birth and death."

§ "The heart when it's released is like the fire element in the air. When fire goes out, it isn't annihilated anywhere. It still permeates space, simply that it doesn't latch onto any kindling, so it doesn't appear.

"When the mind 'goes out' from defilement, it's still there, but when new kindling comes, it doesn't catch fire, doesn't latch on—not even to itself. That's what's called release."

Glossary

Abhidhamma: The third of the three collections forming the Pali Canon, composed of systematic treatises based on lists of categories drawn from the Buddha's teachings.

Ajaan: Teacher; mentor.

Apadana (Avadana): Tales recorded in a late section of the Pali Canon, claiming that the Buddha and his disciples embarked on their path to Awakening by making a gift to an earlier Buddha and dedicating the merit of the gift to a particular type of Awakening.

Arahant: A Worthy One or Pure One, i.e. a person whose heart is freed from the effluents of mental defilement, and who is thus not destined for further rebirth. An epithet for the Buddha and the highest level of his Noble Disciples.

Brahma: An inhabitant of the higher heavens of form and formlessness, a position earned—but not forever—through the cultivation of virtue and meditative absorption *(jhana),* along with the attitudes of limitless goodwill, compassion, empathetic joh, and equanimity.

Buddho: Awake—an epithet of the Buddha.

Chedi: A spired monument, containing relics of the Buddha or his disciples, objects related to them, or copies of Buddhist scriptures.

Dhamma (dharma): The teachings of the Buddha; the practice of those teachings; the release from suffering attained as a result of that practice.

Jataka: Tales recorded in the Buddhist Canon, said to deal with the Buddha's previous lives.

Jhana: Meditative absorption in a single sensation or mental notion.

Kamma (karma): Intentional act—in thought, word or deed—holding consequences for the doer of the act based on the quality of the intention.

Khandha: Heap or aggregate. The five *khandhas* are the component parts of sensory experience, the raw material for one's sense of "self". They are: physical form or sense data; feelings; perceptions and mental labels; thought-constructs; and sensory consciousness (the mind being counted as the sixth sense).

Nibbana (nirvana): Liberation. The extinguishing of passion, aversion, and delusion in the mind, resulting in complete freedom from suffering and stress.

Pali: The oldest recension of the Buddhist Canon; also, the language of that recension.

Parami: Perfection; ten qualities whose development leads to Awakening: generosity, virtue, renunciation, discernment, persistence, endurance, truthfulness, determination, goodwill, and equanimity.

Sangha: The community of the Buddha's followers. On the conventional level, this refers to the Buddhist monkhood. On the ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers—whether lay or ordained—who have practiced to the point of gaining at least of the first of the transcendent qualities culminating in Liberation. The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha together are called the Triple Gem. Taking refuge in the Triple Gem—taking them as the ultimate guides in one's life—is what makes one a Buddhist.

Sumeru: A mythical mountain, tremendously tall, said to lie at the center of the universe, north of the Himalayas.

Than Phaw: Reverend father. A term of respect and affection used for senior monks in southeastern Thailand.

Vessantara: The Buddha in his next-to-last lifetime, in which he perfected the virtue of generosity by giving up his kingdom, together with the things he loved most: his children and his wife.

Wat: Monastery; temple.

Appendix: The Seven Steps

§ From Keeping the Breath in Mind: Method 2, by Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo.

There are seven basic steps:

1. Start out with three or seven long in-and-out breaths, thinking *bud-* with the in-breath, and *dho* with the out. Keep the meditation syllable as long as the breath.

2. Be clearly aware of each in-and-out breath.

3. Observe the breath as it goes in and out, noticing whether it's comfortable or uncomfortable, broad or narrow, obstructed or free-flowing, fast or slow, short or long, warm or cool. If the breath doesn't feel comfortable, change it until it does. For instance, if breathing in long and out long is uncomfortable, try breathing in short and out short. As soon as you find that your breathing feels comfortable, let this comfortable breath sensation spread to the different parts of the body.

To begin with, inhale the breath sensation at the base of the skull and let it flow all the way down the spine. Then, if you are male, let it spread down your right leg to the sole of your foot, to the ends of your toes, and out into the air. Inhale the breath sensation at the base of the skull again and let it spread down your spine, down your left leg to the ends of your toes, and out into the air. (If you are female, begin with the left side first, because the male and female nervous systems are different.)

Then let the breath from the base of the skull spread down over both shoulders, past your elbows and wrists, to the tips of your fingers, and out into the air.

Let the breath at the base of the throat spread down the central nerve at the front of the body, past the lungs and liver, all the way down to the bladder and colon.

Inhale the breath right at the middle of the chest and let it go all the way down to your intestines.

Let all these breath sensations spread so that they connect and flow together, and you'll feel a greatly improved sense of well-being.

4. Learn four ways of adjusting the breath:

a. in long and out long,
b. in long and out short,
c. in short and out long,
d. in short and out short.

Breathe whichever way is most comfortable for you. Or, better yet, learn to breathe comfortably all four ways, because your physical condition and your breath are always changing.

5. Become acquainted with the bases or focal points for the mind—the resting spots of the breath—and center your awareness on whichever one seems most comfortable. A few of these bases are:

a. the tip of the nose,
b. the middle of the head,
c. the palate,
d. the base of the throat,
e. the breastbone (the tip of the sternum),
f. the navel (or a point just above it).

If you suffer from frequent headaches or nervous problems, don't focus on any spot above the base of the throat. And don't try to force the breath or put yourself into a trance. Breathe freely and naturally. Let the mind be at ease with the breath—but not to the point where it slips away.

6. Spread your awareness—your sense of conscious feeling—throughout the entire body.

7. Unite the breath sensations throughout the body, letting them flow together comfortably, keeping your awareness as broad as possible. Once you are fully aware of the aspects of the breath you already know in your body, you'll come to know all sorts of other aspects as well. The breath, by its nature, has many facets: breath sensations flowing in the nerves, those flowing around and about the nerves, those spreading from the nerves to every pore. Beneficial breath sensations and harmful ones are mixed together by their very nature.

To summarize: (a) for the sake of improving the energy already existing in every part of your body, so that you can contend with such things as disease and pain; and (b) for the sake of clarifying the knowledge already within you, so that it can become a basis for the skills leading to release and purity of heart—you should always bear these seven steps in mind, because they are absolutely basic to every aspect of breath meditation.